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SERMONS

BY

FATHERS OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

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S E R M O N S

BY

FATHERS OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

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SERMONS

BY THE

REV. GEORGE R. KINGDON,

Of the Society of Jesus.

SERMON I.

WHAT THE PASSION OF CHRIST TEACHES US.

LAMENT. JEREM. i. 12.

O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus.

O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like to My sorrow.

IF one of the heavenly spirits, who (I will suppose) knew nothing till then of the Incarnation of the Son of God, had been told that his Creator was upon earth living in the form and nature of man, and had wished to seek him out on that terrible Friday of which we are now keeping the anniversary, where are we to think he would have sought Him?

It would profit nothing perhaps to conjecture positively whither he would have directed his search; but surely we may say that it never could have entered his mind to suppose that his God should be dying a felon's death upon Mount Calvary. If, in his glancing flight across the regions of earth, he had chanced to pass that sacred spot, he might have felt emotions of pity at the sight before him, but how could he have dreamt that one of those apparent malefactors undergoing the penalty of crucifixion was the Eternal Word Whom he was seeking?

B

He might see, if he cared to pause a moment, that one of the three had been far more severely treated than the other two; that from the sole of His foot to the crown of His head there was no sound spot in His whole body; that a wreath of thorns was still causing blood to ooze from His wounded temples; that His face was bruised from buffets, and raw from the tearing of His beard; he would see that His flesh had been torn by Roman rods on back and breast and sides, and that His knees were livid and bleeding apparently from falls: he would see that all this was in addition to the torture of crucifixion, whereby this wounded body was strained and dislocated, suspended by huge rough nails hammered through the hands and feet. He might see all this, but what other conclusion could he draw from it than that this Man was a far greater criminal than the others, to have been visited with such unexampled severity of punishment. But why should he stay to contemplate this extremity of human misery? This is not what he seeks; and he would speed on his course elsewhere, without a thought that he had missed the object of his search: without a suspicion that this wretch upon the Cross was the Incarnate God. But let us suppose that he is met by one of his brother Angels more enlightened than himself, that his course is arrested, and that he is brought back to Calvary, and there told that this apparent criminal is his God; what can we think would be his surprise and bewilderment? His first feeling perhaps (if we may judge of Angels' feelings by our own) would be to avenge his Lord upon

His enemies: but putting aside this thought by the reflexion that God could only suffer because He willed it, he would apply his whole powers to discover what could possibly be the meaning of this extraordinary spectacle, and what interpretation could be put on this terrible contradiction—the Author of Life being tortured to death, and the Creator butchered by His own creatures.

And we, my brethren—we, who are far more deeply concerned in this matter than the Angels—shall not we also ask ourselves what it all means? what this awful sight of a God dying, and dying on the Cross, signifies to us? Shall we pass by without raising our eyes to our dying Lord, without pausing awhile to adore and beat our breast, and to offer Him our poor love and devotion for the future? We at least know Who it is that hangs there, for Mary stands at the foot of the Cross to tell us, and we cannot shut our ears to the dying voice of Jesus Himself—"O all you who pass by the way, attend and see if there be sorrow like to My sorrow." "You who are passing by, *attendite*—wait, pause, stay awhile, and look on Me: are you so hurried that you cannot give Me a look or a thought? are you so sleepy, that you cannot watch with Me awhile? I am dying for you, and this is all I ask, that you should look at Me and think—*attendite et videte*." And is this all He asks, my brethren? Yes; for Jesus knows what is in men. He knows our hearts, for He made them: He knows that if we will but look at Him and think, everything else He wishes for will follow. Human nature is not radically bad—

how can it be, since God made it?—and He knows that while the thought of His Passion, and the remembrance of His love, is vivid in our hearts it is impossible that we should bring ourselves to offend Him grievously. Let us stay awhile then on Calvary, before the Cross of Jesus. This is the throne of our great King; let us adore before it. This is the pulpit of our Divine Teacher; let us sit beneath it and attend—attend, and store up the lessons that He teaches us.

I. First then, the Passion of our Lord teaches us what we ought to think of *ourselves* as sinners. Of all the things that are put before us from time to time to impress on us the guilt of sin, the Passion of Christ is the most powerful and most convincing. It is in fact God's *last appeal* to us. He had given to mankind the light of reason, and abundance of supernatural grace to confirm it; and this ought to have been enough to make all understand the detestable nature of sin, and to keep them free from it. He had sent them one revelation after another, telling them of the eternity of hell-fire which awaited sinners at their death, and putting forth His anger at times in terrible visitations for the sins of men. The destruction of men by the Deluge, the fire from heaven that overwhelmed the cities of the plain, the extermination of whole nations, are examples of what I mean. But all these things together fall far short of the Passion of Jesus Christ in conveying to our souls a conception of God's hatred for sin, and of the guilt of those who commit it. It is, as I said, God's last appeal to us. God Himself can go no

farther in expressing to us His detestation of sin, and in putting our guilt before our face, without visiting it upon us in our own persons—a thing which He is specially anxious to avoid. He has made another responsible for our sins, and punished Him for them before our eyes. And who is this other? His own Eternal Son, coeternal and coequal with Himself, loved by Him and loving Him with the whole unalterable fulness of divine charity: infinitely worthy of all adoration and honour, of all happiness and glory. As God-Man among His fellow-men, He is the highest and most noble of the human race, worthy of the most exalted dignity, with an innate right to the service and devotion of all mankind; deserving that every token of approbation and satisfaction from His Eternal Father should be bestowed on Him before the whole world. And yet this adorable God-Man, when He has once taken upon Him the shadow of our guilt, is instantly struck before our eyes by the anger of an offended God. He, Who is the worthy object of His Father's eternal love, becomes in this respect the object of His aversion and of His vengeance; He is treated as if He were really the sinner He is shielding, and so delivered to the executioners. He Who is worthy of the throne of the whole world, and of the love and devotion of all His fellow-men, is abandoned to the unfeeling cruelty of pagan ruffians instigated in their malignity by the unchecked agency of devils. And how fearfully the malice of His enemies was wreaked upon Him! In His case every law was broken in order to load Him with greater ignominy; every principle

of justice violated in order to crush Him the more surely. He is treated as an outlaw whom it would be a crime to let escape. He is condemned without being found guilty, nay, even though His judge proclaimed Him innocent. He is abused for not answering the accusations brought against Him, and struck on the mouth when He does attempt to answer. Left all night in the power of low and heartless soldiers, He is overwhelmed with their coarse jests and brutal violence; they spit in His face, they blindfold Him and buffet Him, and tauntingly bid Him name the one who struck Him. And from that time forward every circumstance that occurred seemed expressly brought about to add to His disgrace and pain. Not only the ferocity of the Jews, but the worldly carelessness of Herod, and the cowardly hesitation of Pilate, all aggravated His sufferings. If He is offered for release, it is only to be rejected for Barabbas; if He is brought out to be pitied, He is met with the yells of a crowd demanding His crucifixion. He is scourged without any cause assigned; He is crowned with thorns for the amusement of the pagan soldiery; and He is condemned to the Cross because the multitude demand it. Without a semblance of reason or justice from beginning to end, the course of this awful tragedy hurries on; stroke after stroke of malice and cruelty is heaped upon His doomed head; heaven frowns upon Him, earth rejects Him, and He is nailed aloft between earth and sky to be taunted and reviled during His three hours' agony. There is no respite, no reprieve: the vengeful anger of God pursues Him till the last dregs of the chalice

have been drained, and the tortured spirit has fled from the lacerated body.

Again I ask, *who* is this, my brethren? The dear and beloved Son of God; the noblest and holiest of the children of men. And why has all this come upon Him? Because the shadow of our sins rested on Him, and He and His Father wished to give us a convincing proof of our guilt and of the punishment that is justly due to it.

If then God visited in His own holy Son the mere shadow of our sin with such awful severity, what has the reality deserved in us? If Almighty God so hates the shadow, must He not hate the substance more? If His hand was so heavy on His Son Jesus, what have we to expect if we fall into His hands as sinners? And remember, this is precisely the lesson our Lord Himself drew when, carrying His Cross, He met the women who wept and bewailed His sufferings. "Daughters of Jerusalem!" He said, "weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children; for if they do these things in the green wood, what shall be done in the dry?" Christ Himself is the green wood, not fit for burning: it is we sinners who are the dry wood, which the fire will readily seize. "If then," says our Lord, "God's anger against sin is so keen and fierce a fire as to consume Me, this green and flourishing tree, because the shadow of sin has passed upon Me; what will it do in the dry wood, which sin has withered?"

This then is the lesson which God wishes us to learn from the Passion—the awful guilt and the awful punishment of sin—a lesson, to teach us which, He

did not hesitate to sacrifice His Son. Let us look to it that we learn it well and thoroughly. If we do, Christ's Passion will not have been in vain for us—God's last appeal will have been successful.

But here a thought occurs, which may serve to impress this lesson still deeper on our hearts. It was men themselves who inflicted these tortures on the Son of God. The Passion was indeed allowed and even intended by God, but it was carried out by men, and that not as mere instruments of God's vengeance or simple executioners of His will—no—they were impelled by their own malice ; they were actuated by that enmity and spite with which evil always persecutes good in this world. Nor may we flatter ourselves that *we* took no part in that persecution. It was a mere accident of time that Jesus fell into the hands of those particular men who scourged and crucified Him. Is it any merit of ours, that we were not living then and there ? And if we had been, can we dare suppose that we should not have done what they did, given our bad passions way and joined in the hue and cry against Him ? You can judge for yourselves, my brethren, by what you do now, whether you would not have been among our Lord's active persecutors then. Have you ever been guilty of mortal sin ? I ask not whether you have repented of it, or whether the guilt is still upon your conscience. Think you that all those who actually took part against our Lord were reprobates ? Do you suppose that many did not repent afterwards and save their souls ? We know in fact that but seven weeks later three thousand of that very crowd who assumed the

responsibility of His murder, were converted by St. Peter's sermon. It matters not therefore for my present purpose whether your sins have been remitted; those who know themselves to have been guilty of mortal sin, ought to look on themselves as having taken part in the murder of their God. You, who abuse your body, which was intended by God to be a temple of the Holy Ghost, and a sanctuary of the Blessed Eucharist—you, I say, who abuse that body for purposes of shame—you were of those who scourged Jesus, and with impious hand lashed His virginal flesh. Nay, when the other executioners were tired, it was you who seized the scourge, and with fresh strength laid new blows upon His bleeding frame. You, who tempt others to sin, and multiply your own guilt by the ruin of other souls: it was you who accused Jesus before Pilate—it was you who persuaded the miserable mob to call for Barabbas' release, and yell for the crucifixion of their God. You, who are puffed up with pride, who have nothing but contempt for others, nothing but indulgence and admiration for yourself—it was you who plaited that crown of thorns and forced it on His shrinking head. You, who speak against holy things and holy practices, who lessen the honour of the Saints, or ridicule those who try to serve God better than yourself—you were among those, and prominent among them, who reviled Him as He hung upon the Cross, bidding Him come down and you would believe Him. And so with other sins.

This then is how we stand with regard to this first lesson, my brethren, which teaches us what we

are to think of *ourselves*. We are to think of ourselves as the murderers of our Lord, and as having by our actual sins deserved far more of His anger than even what He manifested against His Son.

II. But the Passion of Christ teaches us not only what we are to think of ourselves, but what we are to think of Jesus. For what was Jesus doing during it? Exteriorly indeed He suffered and was silent: but His Sacred Heart was busy—busy offering Himself to God's offended Majesty in satisfaction for the sins of men, busy praying for His murderers, busy to omit nothing of His Father's will, busy to provide for His Blessed Mother, and to commit us all to her maternal care; busy, if I may call it so, in suffering interiorly also, and tasting all the bitterness caused by the scorn and ingratitude of men, and the displeasure and dereliction of His Eternal Father.

How was it, my brethren, that this awful deed, the malicious persecution and murder of the Son of God—how was it that this, the greatest sin that was ever committed, could possibly become the cause of the world's redemption—the plenary and abundant satisfaction for all the sins of men? It was the work of the Sacred Heart. For our Lord's sufferings, though they were maliciously inflicted, were willingly and desirously undergone by Him, that He might have wherewithal to atone to His Father for all the sins of men, including even those which His murderers were then committing. All the pains and ignominies therefore that the executioners could shower on Him—He took them eagerly, I may say greedily, into the crucible of His Sacred Heart, and

by the infinite merit of His voluntary oblation, as by a divine alchemy, transmuted all this poison into gold—gold that passes current in the chancery of Heaven—and offered it to redeem the souls of men. This was the work of His Sacred Heart: and the first of the seven words which He uttered on Mount Calvary reveals to us this interior working of His soul. At the moment the act of crucifixion was being accomplished, as our Lord was lying on the sacred wood (that wood, as the Church sings, alone found worthy to bear the ransom of the world), while the nails were being hammered through His hands and feet, His unconquerable love burst forth in words, that we might all know how His Sacred Heart was occupied the while. “Father! forgive them,” He said, “for they know not what they do!”

My brethren, I said just now that *we* also were among those for whom Christ prayed. Not only His actual executioners on the spot, but all who have ever taken part against Him by sin, were the objects of His prayer. You, who added to His scourging—Jesus felt your blows, but offered up the pain for your conversion. You who reviled Him as He hung upon the rood—He heard your scoffs, and prayed for you. Yes, my brethren, though our Lord seems exteriorly to do nothing in His Passion, but only to suffer, yet His Sacred Heart is busy—occupied with the interests of all of us—full of tender unquenchable love—earnest and eager in praying for each, and turning even the pain our sin causes Him into an offering for our soul. What was it sustained His constancy throughout? What was it supported Him

through that long agony, and under that frightful strain and exhaustion caused by the long-continued pain of body and anguish of soul? What was it nerved Him to continue enduring to the last, when at any moment a mere act of His will could have put an end to all His pain? It was the thought of the souls He should save. He thought of each one of us, my brethren, and pleased Himself with the hope that we should love Him for what He was then enduring for our sakes. We must not suppose our Lord redeemed mankind (if I may use the expression) in a lump: He redeemed all indeed, but He distinguished each, and it was the thought of those who would profit by His Passion, who would at some time return Him love for love, that gave Him what little comfort His sufferings allowed. I cannot repeat too often, my brethren, that every one of us here present passed before the view of His soul, that He knew us all, singled each one out with an eager personal love, and pleased Himself with the knowledge that we should think of Him as we do to-day. "This one or that one," He would say to Himself, "though he strikes Me now, a time will come when he will return to Me, and make Me some amends: a time will come when he will remember My Passion, and will know that I remembered him."

What then must we think of Jesus? How can I put it into words, my brethren? There is no heart here, I know, that will not answer that question better interiorly, than language can ever answer it. Tell Him then in your own hearts what you think of Him, what you will always think of Him, and

promise Him that His love of your soul shall not be disappointed.

III. But, my brethren, I have not yet completed my duty to-night. You will yourselves expect something more than what you have yet heard. Good thoughts, right views, are indeed necessary, but they are not sufficient. There is a familiar saying, that hell is paved with good intentions: a proverb by which the common sense of mankind has expressed the truth that any amount of good thoughts and good intentions will never of themselves secure us from damnation. So the lessons we have just now drawn from the Passion of Christ—viz., what we are to think of ourselves, and what we are to think of Jesus—true and necessary lessons as they are, yet will not suffice of themselves; nor are they the only lessons our Lord teaches us from the Cross. The Cross itself is the Christian symbol for self-denial, self-conquest, and amendment of life; and if we do not learn this lesson from it, all other lessons will be useless: we shall have the shadow without the substance. I have said that the Passion of our Lord is the most powerful means to convince us of the guilt of sin. Surely it follows from this that it is also the most powerful motive to induce us to guard ourselves against it, and to foster in our hearts so true a hatred of sin as to make it morally impossible that we should ever again commit it. Even as a motive of fear, if we consider it well, it shows us more forcibly than hell itself, the irreconcilable hatred of God for sin, and the fierceness of His anger against it when He punishes: and who are we miserable

creatures to stand before our great Creator in His wrath? How can we appear with unforgiven sin upon our souls before the face of Him Who spared not His All-holy Son? Shall we not be, as Job expresses it, as a dry leaf before a hurricane? Shall we not, as our Lord Himself says, call on the mountains to fall on us, and on the hills to cover us, to hide us if it were possible from the sense of His anger, which will be more terrible to us than hell's own fires, and from the presence of His wrathful eye. But you will tell me perhaps that it was precisely to save you from this frightful position that our Lord died. Save you—yes: but only on condition that you sin no more. One who continues in his sin—nay, any one who does not actually determine to sin no more—it is out even of Christ's power to save him. How could it be otherwise? Are we to go on sinning in the expectation of being saved by Christ's Passion? Are we to do all the sinning, and expect Him to take all the punishment? Surely not: our hearts revolt at the very thought. Whence comes it then—if this is not what we think—whence comes it that we *do* continue in our sins? Whence comes it that the recurrence of confession finds us so constantly loaded with the same sins to confess?—that we keep on adding to the long catalogue of our sins fresh items which we expect His Passion to blot out? Oh, let us see and acknowledge at length that we have not yet true ideas of what Christ's Passion demands from us. It is true that God's mercy is beyond our comprehension, that the love of Jesus is beyond the measure of our thought; but we must

not therefore strain it to the utmost. Surely the very contrary ought to hold—that since His love for us is so great, we should spare His Sacred Heart, and try to love Him in return. Is it not proof enough of God's mercy, that He has borne with you up to this, that you should go on putting it to further proof? Is it not sufficient evidence of Jesus' love for you that He has received you hitherto so often, and so repeatedly blotted out your sins? If it is, then at last cease to persecute Him, cease to scourge Him, cease to revile Him on the Cross; begin at last to love Him in return, and act as love would prompt you. For love would prompt us to something more than merely to cease from persecuting Him: it would prompt us to a true compunction for past sins; it would prompt us to do some penance for them, if it were only to put ourselves in companionship with Jesus in His Passion; it would prompt us to try and stay the sins of others, especially if hitherto we have been the cause of others' sins; it would prompt us to try and instil the love of Jesus into other hearts also, and to make amends in every possible way to Him for our former mad ingratitude and malice. Once let the true love of Jesus get a hold in our hearts, and it would prompt us to many ways of pleasing Him, for love is ingenious and fertile in expedients for good; it would prompt us to many things which it would be needless and perhaps tedious now to dwell on. I cannot however refrain from one word in conclusion on the first thing of all that it would prompt us to, as being most consonant with our present matter. I said it would prompt us in

the first place to compunction. If there are any here—and surely I may take for granted that it is true of all—if there are any who really and sincerely wish to secure themselves against sin in future, to these I would say: “Do all you can to arouse and foster in your heart a strong and thorough sense of sorrow and contrition for the past.” It stands to reason, my brethren, that we shall shrink from doing again what we are really sorry for having done before. True compunction for our past sins puts sin out of our reach, if I may say so, for the future. Now there can be no higher nor surer mode of exciting this compunction within us, than to remember what part we took in the Passion of Jesus Christ. In the solitude of your chamber then turn your thoughts to Calvary, and kneeling in spirit before the Cross with its precious burden, address your Lord. “To have been one of those who scourged Thee, O my God! to have reviled Thee! to have struck Thee, even while Thou wast suffering to save me! How is it that Thou hast borne with me so long? How is it that Thy holy Angels have not taken vengeance on me for these outrages against Thy Majesty? How is it that the earth has not opened her mouth upon me, to avenge the honour of her Creator? How is it I have not died in my sins, as many others have? It is only from Thy undeserved mercy, O my Saviour, Thy unintelligible love for me. Thou didst stand between me and destruction, and warded off the bolts of God’s wrath by enduring them Thyself! And shall I use the life Thou hast gained for me in still sinning against Thee, in striking Thee again? God forbid! If

in Thy omniscience Thou foreseest that I shall ever again offend Thee mortally, rather take me out of life at once ; for I protest that I would rather die than sin again."

Surely this is not hard to say, my brethren ; and if it is not hard, can you not say it every night when you go to bed ? Can you not say it every morning when you rise ? And if you do so, do you not think that you will at least be safer from sin during the day that comes between the morning and the night, than if you had not done so ? I cannot refer you to-night, my brethren, to our Lord Jesus in the Tabernacle, because for this one day in the whole year the Tabernacle is empty—for this one day no Sacrifice is celebrated, no Communion given. Imagine then that it is to-day that Jesus has died for your sins, and try to rouse yourselves to a more vivid contrition from this thought. But if He has died for our sins to-day, He will be back among us again to-morrow with our pardon in His hands, anxious, eager to give it to all who come to ask it and promise to sin no more !

SERMON II.

OUR LORD'S AGONY IN THE GARDEN.

ISAIAH liii. 6.

Posuit Dominus in eo iniquitatem omnium nostrum.

The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

THE Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, my brethren, is a subject of enormous extent. Those who make a practice of daily meditation, invariably draw their considerations from it during the whole of Lent ; many make it the subject of their mental prayer the whole year round, and their whole life through. Yet they never find the subject exhausted, they never find it wearisome by its sameness. Fresh circumstances strike them, which perhaps had been unnoticed before ; or the same thing appears to them under new aspects ; fresh thoughts, fresh conclusions, fresh applications of Christ's example to their own case are constantly occurring to them, testifying to the inexhaustible fertility of the subject, and the inestimable advantage accruing to the soul from its frequent consideration. It is from the Passion of Christ that the Saints in every age have drawn their heroism : it is from the Passion of Christ that the martyr derives his fortitude, the confessor his

constancy, and the missionary that encouragement and consolation that sustain him in his labours. How true then is that word of the Prophet applied by the Church to the Passion of Christ: *Magna est velut mare contritio tua*—"Thy Passion, O Lord, is boundless as the ocean." Boundless and unfathomable in the sufferings it entailed on Him; boundless and unfathomable in the blessings and graces it has gained for men: boundless and unfathomable to any created intellect that would sound its depths, or travel on its surface.

Yet it is on this boundless and unfathomable subject I have to speak to you to-night. But I have not to speak to those who know nothing of it, to whom the story is a new one, to whom its bearings and applications are unfamiliar. I have to speak to Catholics who commemorate Christ's Passion every Friday, and who have assembled to-day, the chief Friday in the year, not to hear new things, but rather to call to mind in sorrowful solemnity what they already know, if so they may deepen in their souls the impression of His love, increase their compunction for their sins, and strengthen their resolutions of more faithful attachment to His service.

It is therefore unnecessary for me, even if it were possible, to go through the whole history of the Passion, and dwell on each point of the terrible narrative; yet it is a difficult thing, where every point seems to have special claims to notice, to decide on one rather than another, and still more difficult to give good reason for one's choice. As however the choice must be made, I have determined to ask you

to go with me to Gethsemani, and meditate briefly on our Lord's Agony in the Garden; partly because it is the first stage of His Passion, and therefore naturally comes first before us; partly because it is in itself a kind of compendium and foreshadowing of all the subsequent stages of the sacrifice.

If we suppose our Lord Jesus to have been apprehended about midnight, there was an interval of fifteen hours from this to His death upon the Cross at three o'clock the next day; and it is almost unintelligible how so many tortures, so many insults, so much agony as He then suffered, could have been crowded into that short space. Yet during the still shorter interval spent by our Lord in the garden before His apprehension, which is thought to have been three hours, He passed through an epitome of all those tortures and insults, anticipating them and foretasting them in all their bitterness and disgrace. This foreknowledge however and anticipation of His suffering was not the only cause of His agony in the garden: there was also the knowledge, and more than knowledge, we may almost call it the consciousness, of what He was then atoning for, the universal guilt of mankind, past, present, and to come—the guilt which was all laid on Him, and for which He had made Himself responsible. And there was besides all this the bitter, bitter knowledge, that notwithstanding His atonement, notwithstanding His sufferings to secure their salvation, the majority of mankind would persevere in their iniquity, would reject His atonement, and wilfully cast themselves into hell.

Our Lord's Agony in the Garden. 21

These seem to me to be the three principal ingredients in that chalice of interior anguish which our Blessed Lord drained in the Garden of Gethsemani. Let us then, in the spirit of contrition and sorrowful sympathy with Him, humbly and reverently contemplate His prostrate figure, and think with ourselves what is passing in His Sacred Heart during those three bitter hours of desolate distress. And first let us see what the holy Gospel tells us of the circumstances of this terrible scene. It tells us that after the Last Supper our Lord went out with His disciples across the brook of Cedron to a garden on the slope of the Mount of Olives. Judas, it is added, knew the place well, for Jesus had often retired thither with His disciples to pray. Here then our Lord went this night with His disciples, and leaving eight of them together, telling them that He was going a little further on to pray, and bidding them pray also, He took with Him Peter, James, and John. Then, the Evangelist tells us, He began to fear and be distressed, to be sad and sorrowful, and said to the three disciples whom He admitted to be witnesses of His agony—"My soul is sorrowful even to death: tarry ye here and keep watch with Me." Then going from them a little space, as far as you might throw a stone, He knelt down, and bowing His face to the earth, He prayed that if possible the hour might pass from Him, saying—"My Father! if it be possible—and all things are possible with Thee—if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me; yet not what I wish, but what Thou wishest."

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Who can hear even as much as this without being touched at heart? When we see—and perhaps there are but few of us who have seen—a grown-up man give way to grief and sorrow, even though we are not ourselves concerned in his grief, yet we cannot but look on the sight with a feeling of terror as well as of compassion. We cannot but think what must be the intensity of his woe to have overcome that force of self-restraint that manhood gives; how resistless must have been the rush of anguish to have broken down the barriers that guard the entrance of a steadfast heart. But here we have One a prey to agony of mind, One Who is not only perfect Man, but Who is also God! It is true indeed, as holy doctors tell us, that our Lord had at this time withdrawn from His sacred Humanity the sensible support and consolation that His Godhead otherwise afforded it, in order that He might suffer the more; but still His soul had the full perfection of its natural powers, and it was truly the soul of God Who knew how to use those natural powers to their best advantage. Yet this tide of agony overcame Him. I do not mean, of course, that it overcame the steadfastness of His will—that was never touched—but the calm of His soul was gone, He no longer retained His composure, nor even the outward semblance of it. He makes known His state of anguish to His disciples, and seeks help and comfort from them; He bows His face to the earth, and, as St. Paul tells us, with loud cries and tears utters supplications to His Father. What idea then must we form of the awful nature of His interior struggle, of the terrible

poignancy of His distress, when we see the mighty soul of Jesus torn as it were from its moorings by the whirlwind of conflicting emotions, and tossed desolate on the waves of misery? Oh, let us compassionate our dear Lord in His woe, for surely we know that we are not unconcerned spectators of His grief. He Who is suffering before our eyes is One Who loves us more than ever father or mother loved their child. He is suffering for our sakes, and He is suffering through our fault. Our compassion and sympathetic grief for Him is a sensible consolation to His Sacred Heart, and it is what He looks for from us. Three times did He betake Himself to His desolate prayer, with His great soul rent asunder as it were by horror at what He had undertaken to bear for men, and three times did He rise from prayer to seek fellowship and sympathy from His disciples. But all three times He found not what He sought. His three chief Apostles, His most favoured followers, Peter, James, and John, were so little touched with their Lord's distress that each time He came He found them sleeping. The first time that He found them thus asleep, He made them a gentle reproach, addressing St. Peter—"Simon," He said, " sleepest thou?" and then to all—"What! could ye not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." May we not suppose Him uttering these words to us, my brethren? It is as if He said to us—"Sleep ye, while I am fighting for your souls? Sleep ye, while I wake, and undergo toil and pain for your salvation? Sleep ye? Can ye not wake and watch with Me? If not for love of Me, at least for

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your own sakes, awake ! Wake as I will, fight as I will for you, suffer as I will for your sakes, I cannot save you if you sleep. Sleep is death, sleep is destruction. Awake ! awake and pray, lest temptation conquer you." When a man sleeps, my brethren, he has no power over himself, he cannot defend himself from danger ; and if one should sleep in the midst of perils, what wonder if he should not wake again ? We sleep when we are careless against sin. We sleep when we let ourselves float down along the current of our passions, a current which leads surely and with ever-increasing swiftness to destruction. It is then we may hear the voice of Christ speaking to us interiorly—"Sleepest thou ? Is it too much that while I am watching for thy soul, thou shouldst watch also ? Awake and pray, lest temptation should conquer thee."

We have heard the description given by the Evangelists of our Lord's terrible agony in the Garden of Gethsemani, and we have thought with ourselves what must have been its intensity for it to have exercised such overwhelming power on His perfect soul. Let us turn now to consider what were the principal causes of this interior anguish.

I. First then, there was the foreknowledge and immediate anticipation of the frightful trial that was at hand. All the details of His coming Passion presented themselves vividly to His imagination almost as if He suffered them at the moment. It is true that this knowledge of each particular suffering had been present to His soul from the very first. He of course always knew what was to come as distinctly

as we know what has immediately passed ; and no doubt, my brethren, this constant foreknowledge was always a heavy burden for our Blessed Lord to bear. This vivid consciousness of what was to come upon Him at the appointed time must have caused a constant shadow on His Heart ; for it was as it were the spreading of His Passion over His whole life. No one can wonder that though the Gospel tells us of some occasions when He wept, yet it never tells us that He smiled. Yes ! it must have always been a shadow upon His life, but now the effect was increased a thousand-fold. For not only was the time close at hand when His sufferings were to be realized ; but, as I said before, He had Himself (in order that He might suffer the more) withdrawn from His sacred Humanity all that sensible support and help which the Godhead had hitherto afforded it. All the terrors of His situation therefore were allowed to produce their full effect upon His soul, which was left, so far as sensible support went, to depend on its own natural human powers for sustainment. And surely what He foresaw as immediately to come upon Him was enough to appal even the Heart of the God-Man. He saw the indignities of His apprehension in the garden, the desertion of His Apostles, even of him who had been loudest in his assertion of attachment. He saw the night-long insults and buffets that awaited Him in the house of Caiaphas. He saw Himself dragged about from tribunal to tribunal, weary and exhausted from ill-treatment and want of rest, in the midst of a heartless yelling crowd, thirsting for His blood. He saw Himself put up

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with Barabbas, only to be rejected and hooted at : and as in spirit He gazed far out upon the crowd, He saw not a single face without a cruel scowl of hatred and mockery upon it. He saw nothing in any direction but fierce unrelenting eyes bent upon Him with a glance of triumphant malice. He felt Himself abandoned, helpless, in the absolute power of enemies resolved to wreak their utmost cruelty upon Him. But He not only saw their faces, my brethren ; He saw their hearts, a far more fearful sight to Him ; He saw them all brimful of obstinate malignity ; He knew Himself to have done His utmost to gain them, and yet they were hunting Him to destruction as they would a noxious animal that had ventured among men. He knew Himself to be their God, Who could claim their worship and adoration : He knew Himself to be actuated even then by no other feeling than that of love, intense unaltered love towards them, and yet He saw Himself the butt of all their rage. But now the further cruelties present themselves to His thoughts. He feels them all in His imagination as vividly as if He already suffered them. He feels the blows of the scourges, as they fall on His sacred flesh, bruising and tearing what was bruised and torn already. He feels the thorns pressed down upon His brow ; He hears the mocks and taunts of the barbarous soldiery as they bend an insulting knee before Him. He sees again that mass of cruel upturned faces as He is brought out by Pilate after the scourging. He hears the savage cry of "Crucify Him," swelling into a roar as the coward governor weakly tries to appease it.

He hears the base and unjust sentence pronounced against Him to please the mob, and that last suicidal cry of a reprobate people—"His blood be on us and on our children."

Then pass before His mind the closing scenes of this terrific tragedy. He feels the heavy Cross placed upon His wounded shoulders—He toils in spirit up the steep of Calvary—the nails are driven through His hands and feet—the Cross with its sacred burden is raised aloft, and fixed with jarring blows into its place. Nor do His thoughts stop here. That long agony on the Cross is before Him too: His body hanging by its wounds; His naked bleeding flesh smarting under the dark and chilly air; the vinegar offered to His parched lips in answer to His cry of thirst; the gibes and jeers of the priests and people; and worst of all, the sight of His holy Mother's anguish. All this, the realization of which is close at hand, fills His soul with dread, and almost crushes Him to earth. And is not this, my brethren—is not this immediate anticipation of what He knew was coming on Him, enough of itself to account for that overwhelming distress which prostrated Him at Gethsemani, and wrung from Him that deprecating cry—"Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from Me?" "O sweet Jesus! praying to Thy Father in the garden and sweating blood in the agony of Thy grief, have mercy on us!"

II. Let us turn now to consider the second cause of our Lord's Agony in the Garden, the responsibility for all the sins of men. This is why He was to suffer, viz., to atone for our sins; for as the Prophet

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Isaias says in the words of my text—"The Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." Now, atonement for sin consists not only in suffering the punishment due to it, but also in the interior sorrow felt for the offence of God's Majesty. And as our Lord had undertaken to atone for every single sin of each human being, He had first to offer Himself to His Eternal Father as a substitute for each ; and having been accepted as such, and so put under His Father's wrath, as if He were Himself the sinner whom He represented, He had to identify Himself with each, to take upon Himself the sins of each as if they could have been His own, to elicit acts of true heartfelt contrition for them, and submit to such punishment for them in His own Person as His Eternal Father was pleased to exact. Every sin therefore committed by mankind, or that shall be committed to the end of the world, not only came *before* Him, but came *upon* Him then for atonement. He took their guilt on Himself as if they had been His own, and He remained there prostrate before His Father's throne, crushed under a sense of guilt, and trembling to feel Himself exposed to the anger of Him to Whom He was indissolubly bound by ties of eternal love. How shall we conceive this terrible truth, my brethren? It is as if all human creatures passed in procession before their prostrate Lord, all in their turn casting upon Him the burden of the sins they carried, weighing His soul down with their guilt, stifling Him with their foulness. See what shudders pass through His shrinking frame, as each fresh heap is emptied out upon Him. He

Who is Holiness itself, Who hates sin infinitely, finds Himself in personal contact with sin, identified with it, clothed with it as with a garment. Oh ! what terrible disgust and horror must have filled His Sacred Heart at this close contact with the sins of men—disgust and horror at feeling them upon Him, even though He takes them voluntarily, and tries with the full power of His contrition to blot them out and atone for them to the outraged Majesty of God. Some cost Him more than others. Even the least sin indeed is inexpressibly foul in God's sight ; but some no doubt are far more foul than others. The least terrible to Him were those committed in ignorance, by barbarous nations who had lost the knowledge of His truth, and who had only their natural reason to guide them. The sins of His own people, the Jews, lay heavier on Him, for they were committed against supernatural light and grace, and were made blacker by their base ingratitude. But the sins of the Jews were a thousand-fold less hateful to Him, less grievous, less painful, less defiling than the sins of Christians, of Catholics—Christians, whom He has made partakers of His name and nature, who know Him and what He has done for them, and yet add fresh sins daily to the heap they have already cast upon Him—Catholics, to whom He has granted the fulness of the truth, with whom He dwells almost under the same roof ; Catholics, who enjoy the blessings of His daily Sacrifice, whom He admits to ineffable union with Him in the Holy Eucharist. It was the sins of Catholics, my brethren, that pained Him most, that drew from

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His o'erfraught Heart the heaviest sighs, that forced from His enfeebled frame the most copious shower of bloody drops in the Garden of Gethsemani. And now, my brethren, let us suppose that our turn has come—that we too come up to our kneeling Lord and discharge our load of sins upon Him. Yes—it must be so. We have committed our sins, and now we must put them upon Him; whether we will or no, it must be done. When we have thrown a stone from our hands, we cannot recall it: we may perhaps see it going straight to strike and injure one whom we love, but we cannot recall the cast. We must stand helpless, and see it strike and wound. Perhaps we aimed it not, perhaps we never thought to hit our aim—it matters not—the stone has left our hand and it must strike its mark. Yet in the case of sin, can we say we did not know what we were doing, that we did not know Whom we were striking, that we did not know our sin would come upon Jesus Christ? It may be indeed that we did not think of it as we ought. Surely no one, who knows our Lord as you all know Him, would with full thought and deliberation strike and insult Him to His face; but the thing is done, the sin has been committed, and its punishment, its pain, its agony must come upon Jesus Christ. We must then put our load upon Him, and see it bow His head still lower, and cause fresh throbs of anguish in His Sacred Heart. I can fancy some repentant soul saying—“What! can I do nothing to lighten the weight of my sins for Him—can I not at least bear some part of the burden myself, and save my Lord something

of the charge?" No—it is impossible. No doubt, my brethren, there must be always *personal penance for personal sin*; but as for atonement to God's Majesty, none can accomplish it but Jesus Christ. He then must bear the weight, the guilt of every sin—of yours and mine: but at least let us see and recognize how much it is we lay upon Him, how much it is He bears for us. Let us count our past sins closely, for He counted them; let us weigh them well, for He felt their utmost weight; let us school our heart to compunction and contrition by thinking of the full and adequate contrition He felt for them. Let us curb and restrain those evil inclinations that have led us into sin hitherto; let us guard all the avenues of our souls, remembering our Lord's words that He speaks to us from this very spot of His agony—"Watch and pray, lest temptation overcome you." Above all, my brethren, let us strive daily to love our Lord more, Who has so loved us and refused nothing for our sake, even to clothing Himself with our sins; let us strive daily to please Him more and more, and think more and more of what we owe to Him. But what shall we say then of those, who, after discharging their load of guilt upon our Lord as He kneels there in grief and anguish, return again and again, careless of what they cost Him, thoughtless of what He suffers, but careful only to please themselves, careful only to indulge their own pride, it may be, or their gluttony, their revenge, or other evil passions. O hard hearts! think what it is you do! After He has forgiven you a hundred times, perhaps a thousand times, and

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it may be oftener still ; after He has so often relieved you of the burden you had laid upon yourselves, and which but for Him would have sunk you for ever in hell ; after He has interposed so often in your behalf, and borne in His own Person the vengeance that was due to you—can you go on demanding more from Him, laying more stripes upon Him, heaping upon Him more and more of that loathsome venom from which His pure nature shrinks so painfully ? Oh ! bethink you ! enter into yourselves : recognize the baseness of your conduct : and here to-night, on this great anniversary of His Passion, break for once and for all with those sinful habits which you have allowed to enchain your souls. Range yourselves no longer with the enemies and persecutors of Jesus : take part no more in that base procession that keeps on adding to His agony ; but join yourselves at last to that band of penitents who by compunction and fidelity strive to requite our Lord a little for the grief their past sins caused Him.

“O sweet Jesus ! praying to Thy Father in the garden, and sweating blood in the agony of Thy grief, have mercy on us !”

III. But besides the anticipation of His coming Passion, and the personal contact with the sins of mankind, was there anything else that weighed on our Lord's soul and added to His agony ? Probably there were many other things, my brethren ; some of which we might conjecture, others we shall never know even by conjecture. But there was certainly one other prominent ingredient in the bitter chalice,

one other cooperating cause of our Lord's agony, at which I will glance for a moment: and that is the disappointment of His loving Heart at not being able to save all men. *Quæ utilitas in sanguine meo?*—"What advantage is there in My blood-shedding?" These are the words in which by the mouth of the Prophet He expresses this disappointment. He offered Himself for all, He was accepted for all, He suffered for all; His Passion was more than sufficient to save all, it would have sufficed to save a thousand worlds. Yet a few only are saved. This was perhaps the bitterest drop of any: to see the inefficacy of all His pains, to see those precious souls, for which He had paid so awful a price, snatched from Him at last and for ever; snatched from Him by the malignant fiend, and plunged into those eternal fires from which He was dying to save them. When I say, snatched from His hand by Satan—this of course must not be misunderstood. Satan indeed does all he can to snatch them, but after all, he has no power over souls but what those souls themselves give him. It is rather men themselves who snatch their own souls from the victorious and loving hands of Christ, and place them in the grip of their malignant enemy. Try to realize a little, my brethren, the cruel pang, the bitter hopeless disappointment of our loving Lord as He saw so many souls lost for ever, whom He loved better than His own life. We are told that St. Teresa once had a vision in which she saw the souls of men falling into hell like snow-flakes in a winter's storm: this was the simile she used to express what was

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shown her. We have no reason to think the expression exaggerated. It is reckoned that more than eighty thousand deaths take place daily upon the whole earth. How many of these souls are saved? How many lost? We know not—God only knows. But this we know, that those who are saved are saved by Christ's Precious Blood, and those who are lost are lost in spite of His all-sufficient sacrifice. This then was what our Lord saw. He saw Himself willingly given up to torture and to death to save all men, and He saw His eager loving purpose frustrated by the criminal folly and the mad perversity of so many wretched souls. Oh, my brethren, it is a thing that happens to parents sometimes in this world to see a son or a daughter whom they love, for whom they would lay down their lives, to see them spite of warnings and entreaties, spite of wholesome counsel and restraints, to see them through some mad folly plunge into ruin, and disgrace themselves for life. These parents perhaps may have some little taste of that bitter pang of hopeless sorrow that rent asunder the Sacred Heart of Jesus at the loss of so many souls, His ransomed prisoners, the children of His Passion, the heirs of His eternal kingdom. So few are saved! so many lost! He tells us Himself. "Many are called," He says, "but few are chosen!" And again—"Strive to enter at the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are that go in thereat. How narrow is the gate and strait the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it!"

We cannot wonder then, my brethren, at our Lord's agony—we cannot wonder at His sweat of blood, when we remember the sad and bitter thoughts that crowded in upon His Sacred Heart. And now there is a question that we must ask ourselves. Shall we add any more to our Lord's sorrows—or shall we try to compensate Him for past ingratitude by future fidelity? Shall *we* also disappoint Him by spurning His salvation, or shall we gladden Him by clinging to His Cross? It is not a question that requires long consideration, nor asks many words to answer it. Life and death are put before you, and you know the way to each. The sayings about the few and the many are not to frighten us, but to make us earnest. There is room among the few for all of us. If there are difficulties in the way, you have our Lord at hand to help. He Who died for you will not desert you. Let this then be our cry to Him to-night, and ever when we need His help—

“O sweet Jesus! praying to Thy Father in the garden, and sweating blood in the agony of Thy grief, have mercy on us!”

SERMON III.

THE CHOICE BETWEEN JESUS AND BARABBAS.

ST. LUKE xxiii. 18.

Tolle hunc, et dimitte nobis Barabbam.

Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas.

THE day has come for which we have been so long preparing. Good Friday casts a long shadow over the year—a shadow which deepens and deepens as we penetrate into it, until we reach the black gloom and desolation of the day itself. All Lent may be said to be the shadow of Good Friday : for our holy Mother the Catholic Church tries to prepare us during it to commemorate our Lord's death with proper dispositions ; and this she does by bidding us do some little penance for our sins which caused His death, imposing on us some corporal mortification, and exhorting us to interior sorrow of soul. And as the anniversary of His death drew nearer, louder and louder has sounded her note of preparation ; until within the last fortnight she has kept the Passion itself before us with ever-increasing distinctness, knowing well the day itself is far too short to produce the impression she would wish it to produce, unless the soul has been properly disposed beforehand. The

day has come—that one day throughout the year on which no Sacrifice is offered throughout the whole of Christendom—that one day on which the Tabernacles are empty from morn till night—that one day which has no fellow, but stands alone in its bitterness and its gloom. The day has come—nay, I may say it has come and gone. The Church's Offices have been all performed. We have heard the whole course of our Lord's Passion described by His beloved Disciple, we have cast ourselves at the feet of the Crucified, and have adored Him with a reverent kiss. We have heard the last wail of the Tenebræ, and have even joined in spirit with that desolate Mother, with Joseph and Nicodemus, as they laid the sacred Body in the hollow rock. The Church has done all she can for us. It remains for us to confer a little together on all we have seen and heard, as we may suppose the desolate disciples to have done, when they came together after the Crucifixion, with timid step and bated breath, to talk over the harrowing scenes of the past day and night. But what shall I speak to you about? To dwell on every point of our Lord's Passion is impossible, and to choose one point rather than another where every scene calls so loudly for our attention, appears equally impossible. What I have done then is simply this: I have taken what first occurred to me, without seeking any other reason; knowing well that any words spoken on the Passion of Jesus will edify devout and loving hearts. My text will have told you already that the subject of my discourse to-night is the choice made between Jesus and Barabbas.

Let us first recall the circumstances of the occurrence. It needed not any extraordinary sagacity on Pilate's part to discover, what the Gospel tells us he had discovered, that it was out of malice and envy the Priests and principal Jews had delivered our Lord to him for judgment. The very accusation they preferred against Him was enough to show it. They accused Him before the Roman Governor of trying to seduce the Jewish people from their allegiance to the Roman Cæsar, and of representing Himself to be their King. Now Pilate must have known well that these very men would only have been too glad of an opportunity of making a successful revolt against their Roman masters—he must have known well that they were actually in hopeful expectation of a Messiah Who should free them from the Roman yoke, and restore the kingdom to Judah. He knew well therefore that it was not from love to the Romans that they brought him a man under this accusation, but out of personal hatred of their prisoner. He had lived long enough among them also to have heard of our Lord Jesus, and of the opposition constantly offered Him by the Chief Priests and Doctors of the Jews. It is likely enough, moreover, that it may have reached his ears from some centurion or others present at our Lord's seizure and nocturnal examination—he may well have learnt from some such source, that the Jews among themselves, when they tried Jesus in their own tribunal, had made no mention of such a charge as this. At any rate this charge of treason against Rome seems never to have been seriously entertained by Pilate ; and it is evident

that a few words of our Lord were sufficient to dispel it entirely from His mind. Knowing then that the prisoner was the victim of a malicious persecution, he wished either to set Him free, or at least to be free himself from the responsibility of His death. It was with this latter object that he had sent our Lord to Herod, and now that he had failed in this, he turned his thoughts to a device for freeing Him altogether—a device which ended only like the former in adding to our Lord's pain and ignominy, and urging the Jews still more to demand His death. It was a custom with the Governors of Judea to release some prisoner at the Feast of the Pasch—a prisoner whom the people named. If then he could induce the people to ask for the release of Jesus, the difficulty would be over and an innocent man saved. In order to secure this he proposed to the people only two names, those of Jesus and Barabbas. Now Barabbas, the Evangelist tells us, was a robber and a murderer. Pilate chose the worst criminal he had in his prisons the better to secure his object, viz., that the people should choose Jesus for release rather than such a notorious villain as the one he named with Him. He knew too that Jesus had lately been a popular favourite, and had been welcomed to the city with processions and hosannas; he thought therefore that though the Chief Priests were inimical to Him, the people would not hesitate to choose Him for release. But he deceived himself. The Priests went about amongst the people spreading the lying tales against our Lord that had been brought up the night before, telling them that He

had a design of destroying the Temple, that He was but a pretended Messiah, and had been deceiving them with false hopes, and that He must be put out of the way in order that the true Messiah might appear: and by thus working on their superstitious feelings easily succeeded in their malicious object. So that when Pilate came forward and spoke aloud to the people, "Which of the two do you wish me to release for you; Barabbas, or Jesus Who is called Christ?" the miserable blind multitude roared out its guilty cry, "Barabbas! Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas!" Pilate was evidently taken by surprise, but he would not give way so easily. "What then," he said, "shall I do with Jesus?" And they all replied, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." Again Pilate argued with them saying—"Why, what evil hath He done? I find no cause for death in Him. I shall therefore chastise Him and dismiss Him." But again came the roar of the fanatic mob—"Crucify Him, let Him be crucified!" And this frightful cry ceased not till they had their will, for Pilate, daunted by their violent clamour, at length yielded; yet even while pronouncing sentence he returned to his original idea of trying to shift the responsibility of our Lord's murder from his own conscience. He therefore ordered water to be brought, and washing his hands before the whole multitude, exclaimed—"I am innocent of the blood of this just Man. See ye to it." And the Jewish mob replied with an imprecation that makes us shudder even now when we hear it read—"His blood be upon us and upon our children!" And so they

had their way ; and their own curse has been visited upon them from that day to this.

In this portion of our Lord's Passion which I have described, there are two subjects for consideration—the choice made by the Jews, and the choice made by Almighty God. The Jews had to choose who should be set free, who should be delivered from death. Almighty God had to choose who should be the victim to His justice, sinful man or His sinless Son. The choice of the mob, and the choice of Almighty God were as opposite to one another as they possibly could be : but both had the same result for our Blessed Lord—He, the sinless One, was to die, and Barabbas the sinner was to escape.

I. In considering the choice of the Jews, and the motives which actuated them in making it, we must look at the two parties among them, the multitude who allowed themselves to be deceived by the Priests and Elders, and the party of the Priests and Elders themselves. Among the numerous instances that history has recorded of the fickleness and ingratitude of the body of the people, acting as a mass, there is none more astounding than this. Here was One Whom they had long known, Who had been among them for three years, Who spoke, according to the report even of men who were sent to seize Him, as never man spoke, Who had healed numbers among them, and never refused any who applied to Him, Who had only about a week back performed a most stupendous miracle of restoring to life one who had been four days dead—a miracle witnessed by a large number of people. Here was One Whom this very multitude

but four days ago had gone forth to honour and conducted into the city in triumph on account of that great miracle—One Whom they knew to be of the royal line of David, their great King, and Whom they had hailed as their long expected Messiah : and yet now they are crying out for His death, and such a death, a death of felons and malefactors, a death upon the Cross!—and yet now they are preferring before Him a robber and murderer, an abandoned ruffian whose soul was steeped in sin. We are quite astounded at such a sudden change ; we are almost perplexed to imagine how men with the gift of reason could thus without solid grounds turn round from love to hatred, from favour to persecution. My brethren, it was precisely because they did not use their reason, but allowed themselves to be guided by their passions, that this wretched multitude came to be guilty of the awful crime of Deicide. The great mass of them permitted themselves to be swayed by a few malicious hearts without reflecting into what frightful depths of injustice and cruelty they were being led. It is always *easier* to yield than to resist when we are solicited to evil—it is always *easier* to do what we see others do than to stand up and resist the influence of bad example. Yes, it is easier, but that is no reason for doing it. It is easier no doubt to lose one's soul than to save it, but no one will say that is a reason for letting our souls be lost. No doubt many in that yelling crowd cried "Crucify Him," simply because their neighbours did, but this did not lessen their responsibility or their guilt. They were bound to use their reason, they were bound

to remember His innocence and goodness of which they had had themselves irrefragable proof, they were bound *not* to take part against Him, and *not* to cooperate in His persecution, at least until they had as stringent proof of His guilt as they already had of His innocence. No doubt we feel indignant at the Jewish crowd, and just it is we should: but let us keep some of our indignation for ourselves. We have that within us, viz., fallen human nature, which if not quelled and tamed, if not kept in due subjection by self-denial, will bring us to as low a depth as that to which they sank. Nay more, if the conscience of any tells them that they have allowed themselves to be persuaded into sin—if they have shut their eyes to the guilt of what they knew was wrong, and given in to the bad example or evil influence of others; then I tell them, and tell them boldly and unequivocally, “You too, had you been among the crowd before the tribunal of Pilate, would have cried out against Jesus of Nazareth—Crucify Him! crucify Him!” We must keep then some of our indignation for ourselves. Every one of us has had his guilty share in the death of Christ, some in one way, some in another. The crowd that yelled away His life had one kind of participation in the crime, the Elders and Doctors who persuaded them to do so had another. Judas, Pilate, and Herod, each had their different share. Those who scourged, and those who crowned Him, those who nailed Him to the Cross, or gave Him vinegar, or reviled Him as He hung in His agony, all and each in a different way took part in His murder. Not one of us but may find his counter-

part in one or other of these if he looks on himself aright. Let us keep therefore some indignation for ourselves, and if we recognize ourselves to have been among the murderers of Jesus, let us at least be on His side in future, and not crucify Him anew by future sins!

To pass now from the crowd to those who influenced it, the Chief Priests and Doctors of the Jews, what shall we say was their motive for preferring the release of Barabbas to that of Christ, and for urging so violently the crucifixion of Jesus? It was this: they loved the world, and what it gives; they loved worldly power and honours, worldly enjoyments and influence, and our Lord Jesus in many senses stood in their way while they were pursuing these objects of their desire, and so they bent their whole souls to crush and trample Him to the dust. First, they coveted the homage and reverence of their own nation for their learning, and for the few simulated virtues to which they pretended; and our Lord doubly prevented this, partly by drawing to His own Person the love and devotion of the people by His winning gentleness, His benefits and miracles, His noble doctrine, and His true and undeniable virtues, and partly also by unmasking their hypocrisy and showing them in their true colours. Again, our Lord preached self-denial and humility and other things which are utterly hateful to all lovers of the world; and it is this especially that is the real cause of all the cruel persecutions which Christ and His true Church have always met with. These were the reasons that moved the Priests and Pharisees to

sweep our Lord Jesus from their path, and hoping by the severity of their treatment to put an end at once and for ever to such distasteful maxims, they determined to pursue Him to death with the utmost cruelty. And there are none so cruel as those who are thwarted in their criminal inclinations and yet are determined to indulge them. Revenge and anger rankle in their hearts until they find their opportunity, and then no wild beast is more ferocious in its onslaught on its prey. It was now their hour, as our Lord told them, and fiercely and brutally did they avail themselves of their hour. "Their *hour*," my brethren; think of that word, for, as in all God's words, there is a depth of meaning in it which may escape a superficial view. This was *their hour*. An hour soon passes; they have had their turn, and whose turn comes next? It is *God's*: and not God's *hour*, but God's *eternity*! Where is their triumph then? Where was these men's triumph when their hour was passed (and their hour ended with our Lord's last breath)? Where was their triumph when the rocks were rent, and the earth was shaken, and the veil of the Temple torn asunder? Were these the signs of *their* victory, or of Christ's? Oh, let us learn, and it is a lesson we may have need of, not to fear those who kill the body and after that have nothing they can do against us: they have but their hour after all, and God has His eternity. Let us be found on God's side, and the hour of the enemy shall soon pass. We need this lesson at the present time. When we look out upon the world we may see numbers of men who are playing the same part

towards Christ's Vicar upon earth that the Priests and Pharisees acted towards Christ Himself. Learned men some of them who can put their accusations very forcibly, and tell their lies with all the plausibility of truth: men in authority, others, leaders and deceivers of the people, who tempt the unthinking multitude with the cry of liberty, and then enslave them a thousand times worse than ever. The liberty they mean is liberty to indulge their own avarice and ambition, their own pride and tyranny and lust, without check or hindrance from the warning voice by which Christ speaks to men. They know that nothing but violence can silence that unwelcome voice, which unmasks their own hypocrisy and interprets to the nations the eternal rule of right and wrong. And so the sacred speaker must be accused and slandered, He must be brought into the power of Pilate, and hurried away from his hands to those of Herod; the people must be got to shout for Barabbas to be let loose—"Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas!" Not that the Priests and Doctors loved Barabbas, but that they hated Christ; nor again when they cried "We have no King but Cæsar" (a cry that has its counterpart in our times too), had they any true allegiance to Cæsar in their hearts. But even the hard rule of a worldly tyrant gives far greater liberty to worldly passions, and is therefore more acceptable to mere worldlings, than the holy law of Christ. What may happen next we know not, but this we know, that though the powers of darkness may have their hour, yet it is an hour only. Let us keep our faith then,

and be found on the side of Christ and His Vicar when that hour is past. Yes ; it is our Faith that is in question. It is part of the true Catholic Faith that the Pope represents Christ on earth, that he and he only (I mean to the exclusion of all civil powers) has authority to decide for us what is right to believe, what is right to do—that even Kings and Emperors are bound to obey such decisions at the peril of their souls. It matters not then for us what arguments may be brought : let them be as imposing and apparently as immovable as the Alps that lie between us and Rome—Faith knows how to wing her eagle flight above the loftiest summits of earthly obstacles. Our Faith rests not on arguments, but on the revelation of God ; arguments therefore have no more real power against it than the decree of a human monarch would have against the rising of the tide. Look to your Faith then, and meet with contempt, the utmost and absolute contempt, any statements or arguments that go even a hair's breadth against the authority of the Pope, wherever you may see them or from whomsoever you may hear them : and remember well that those who speak against the Pope are only the modern counterpart of those who cried out for the crucifixion of our Lord, and shouted for the release of Barabbas !

II. We must now consider briefly—more briefly than I had intended, since I have dwelt longer than I thought of doing on the first point—the choice made by Almighty God between Jesus and Barabbas. Which will *He* have as an atoning sacrifice to His outraged Majesty ? Which will *He* prefer as a victim to His

justice, the sinner who insulted Him, or His own Eternal and sinless Son, Who has offered Himself as a propitiation and atonement in the sinner's stead? And here, in order to enter fully and intelligently into this consideration, we must, each one of us, imagine himself standing in place of Barabbas, and that the choice lies between ourselves and Christ, Who has offered Himself to His Eternal Father in our stead. Let us remember that this is precisely what He did at this very crisis of His Passion which we are engaged upon. Although He felt, and felt most deeply the fresh insult and outrage that was offered to His love by the brutal ingratitude of the Jews, yet notwithstanding He did not wish it otherwise (except as far as they were sinning by their act), for He wished His sacrifice to be accepted, and He knew that His rejection by the Jews was really the acceptance of His sacrifice by His Eternal Father. He offered Himself then and there to save that very Barabbas who was put up in contrast with Him, and rejoiced at his release, because it symbolized His Father's consent to the release of all mankind (if they would be released) from their sins and their punishment, and the acceptance of His own holocaust in their stead. And we must not imagine that our Lord offered Himself for mankind in the mass—no—He had each one individually and separately in His thoughts, and offered Himself for each particular soul with a personal love for each, and consequently for each one also in this assembly, not as included with the rest, but as if that one soul alone had sinned, as if that one soul alone was under the wrath of

God. Therefore when I tell you each one to consider yourselves in Barabbas' place while that choice is being made, this is really the place each one held in our Lord's thoughts, and before Almighty God at that moment. What then should be our thoughts as we imagine ourselves in this position? It is we who have sinned, and it is we sinners who deserve the wages of our sin, *i.e.*, death both temporal and eternal: and here is the Eternal Son of God, out of pity and personal love for us, offering Himself in our human nature to suffer the most frightful torments in our stead, so to save us from Hell and to atone to His Eternal Father for our offences. If this wonderful truth were not so familiar to us, if we were to hear it now for the first time, we should be lost in amazement at the idea. And surely if we consulted the nobler impulses of our nature, we should at once protest against what would appear so monstrous a substitution; we should be kindled to a proper sense of our deserts by the spectacle of so incredible a generosity. Let us, each one, imagine ourselves then to address Almighty God, as we stand before Him with our Lord Jesus, for Him to say which shall be the victim for our sins. "O Eternal Father," we might say, "it is I who have offended Thee, it is I who deserve punishment, not Thy Blessed Son. Let Thy hand be upon me, not upon Him. It is true that He has offered Himself to suffer my punishment and free me from it: but how can I endure that this offer should be accepted? it is His love for me that has made Him offer Himself thus, but it is this very love of His for me, this wonderful love,

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that makes me the more unwilling He should suffer. I cannot bear that a hair of His head should be touched in such a cause. I am not worth a thought, that I should be saved at His expense. Here am I then ; punish me, and let my Lord go free !” And what are we to suppose would be the answer of Almighty God to our appeal ? My brethren, there is no presumption in imagining the reply. “Go !” He would say, “*you* cannot atone to Me for a single venial sin. You can sin, and you have sinned, but you cannot compensate for your sin. I could punish you, but your punishment would be no adequate atonement to My Majesty. There is none but My Son who can atone for your sins. You say truly that He loves you, and seeing how He shows His love, you cannot but love Him in return. Let this then be your punishment—to stand by and see One Who so loves you suffer for your fault, to stand by and see One Whom you cannot but love punished for your sins.” And oh, my brethren, if we have hearts at all, is not this a punishment ? to stand by and see the punishment of our dear Lord, and know that we have done it ? to stand by and see Him bear it all so patiently in our stead, and we not able to save Him a single buffet, a single stroke, a single thorn ? to stand by and see Him flayed with the scourge for what we have done ? crowned with thorns for our pride ? drenched with gall and vinegar for our gluttony ? nailed to the Cross and dying on it for our mortal sins ? to stand by and see Him all the while looking at us with love, and showing us that He takes pleasure in the thought of dying for

us to save us from eternal death ! Yes, if we have hearts it must be a punishment to us. But surely we must at least do this—we must at least stand by and weep, if we can do no more ; we must at least show Him that we try to appreciate His love and our own guilt. And indeed His love expects it of us. “O all ye who pass by the way, attend and see,” He cries. “Attend and see!” For He knows the hearts He has created, He knows that if they will but attend to what He has suffered for them, and to the love that He has shown them, it is morally impossible they should sin mortally again. Attend then, my brethren, to our Lord’s Passion if you wish to secure yourselves from sin. Think of what you have already caused Him, and forbear to crucify Him afresh.

SERMON IV.

EASTER SUNDAY, 1872.

COLOSS. iii. 1.

Si consurrexistis cum Christo, quæ sursum sunt quærite, ubi Christus est in dextera Dei sedens.

If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.

THE Christian Church has always considered Easter as the great central festival of the year. And with reason. For though it was by the Incarnation of the Son of God, His Nativity, the Mysteries of His Life, and especially of His Sacred Passion, that our redemption was worked out, yet it is only by His Resurrection that the fruits of this redemption are brought home to us and applied to our souls. The Resurrection of our Lord from the dead was the pledge and assurance that His sacrifice had been accepted as He offered it, namely, for the salvation of mankind; it was the crown and completion of His work; the proclamation of His victory over Satan, that great enemy of God and men. It was the risen Christ that founded the Christian Church and delivered the government thereof to Peter; it was the risen Christ Who sent His Apostles to teach all nations His holy faith; it was the risen Christ that put into His Apostles' hands the pardon for men's

sins, which He had earned, and bade them impart it to the penitent. Perhaps we may say that, in the scheme of redemption which His divine wisdom has actually chosen, Christ could not give to *men* the power of forgiving sins until after His Resurrection. He Himself could say "Thy sins are forgiven thee," for He was God; He would not however yet bestow this divine prerogative on men. But by His death He gained a *new* right as God-Man to bestow forgiveness, in consequence of His Father's acceptance of His atonement; and this new right He *would* impart to men. And it was this He came back among men to do. Well may St. Paul say, "If Christ be not risen, then is your faith vain, our preaching also is vain." For the Christian religion and the Christian Church depend upon our Lord's Resurrection in a more important and complete sense than they can be said to depend upon any other fact or mystery connected with our redemption.

But besides appealing to the fact of the Resurrection as a proof of our Lord's divine mission and of the truth of the Christian religion, the sacred writers of the New Testament, and especially St. Paul, make use of it in connexion with various other points. The two principal uses St. Paul makes of it in his Epistles are—first, as a proof and pledge of our own resurrection with our bodies at the last day; and, secondly, as an illustration of the new life that Christians are bound as such to lead, in contrast with the lives of those who are not Christians. It is this last point of view that I shall dwell upon to-day. Let us therefore in the first place consider what connexion there is

between the Resurrection of Christ and the life which Christians ought to lead here below, and how St. Paul applies the one in illustration of the other.

It is of course by Baptism that we are made Christians. Now in Apostolical times, and for many subsequent centuries, Baptism was given by immersion—total immersion; that is to say, the person baptized was put for a moment entirely under water, as indeed the word baptism in its original sense implies. Two things were considered to be symbolized by this ceremony. First, the entire cleansing of the soul from all previous stain of sin was expressed by the whole body being subjected to the purifying power of the natural water; and, secondly, the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of Christ were renewed and represented in the person of each individual Christian. When the catechumen descended into the water, and was entirely covered and as it were drowned in it, and hidden away out of sight by it, the death and burial of Christ was represented in him, and he was considered to die to the world and to its principles, and to his own former life in it. And when he arose from out the water, and came forth a baptized Christian, it was the Resurrection of Christ that was represented and in part fulfilled in him; and he was held to have risen to a new life, the Christian life, in which he was to live according to new laws, new maxims, and new motives. It is in allusion to this meaning contained in the baptismal ceremony, that St. Paul says to the Romans, "We who died to sin, how shall we live any longer in it? Know ye not," he continues, "that

we all who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized in His death? For we were buried with Him by our Baptism; that, as Christ rose from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.”* And again to the Colossians, “Ye were buried with Him in Baptism, in which also ye have risen by the faith of the operation of God, Who raised Him from the dead.”† And then he draws the inference which I have taken for my text. “Therefore if you be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Mind the things which are above, not those which are on the earth.” It is as if he said, “Remember that ye are new men. The power of Christ’s death was manifested in you, when you bowed your heads beneath the cleansing waters; then you died to your former selves, renouncing that pagan life of the concupiscences by a voluntary death like His upon the Cross. But this voluntary death was, like His also, a passage to a new life. God raised you up with Him from your self-abasement, and has made you partakers of His heavenly life even here, as an earnest and pledge of an entire union with Him in His glory hereafter. Remember this, therefore,” he says, “and live accordingly. It is Christ’s life that you have risen to, and it is in that you must live hereafter. You have died to the world, and cannot live any longer by its maxims or in its ways. You have cast in your lot with Christ, and already received His new life; you can never be what you were before; take care to remain what you are now.”

* Rom. vi. 3.

† Coloss. ii. 12.

If, however, it was useful to remind even those early Christians of these things—those primitive converts who were still in their first fervour, who remembered well the horror and hopeless slavery of their pagan lives, and were now full of joy and gratitude for their deliverance and for the possession of that liberty wherewith Christ had made them free—if, I say, St. Paul thought it useful to remind even these of their obligations in this new life of theirs, lest they might come insensibly to relax their hold upon the heavenly maxims of Christ, and swerve, were it ever so little, from the narrow way on which they had entered; let *us* not think it superfluous to remind ourselves from time to time of our high calling, of our noble birth as Christians, of our baptismal vows, and that irrevocable renunciation of the world, the flesh, and the devil, which we then made, and so often have renewed, and which is recorded to our names in the Book of Life.

It is true that we have no life before Baptism to look back upon and abhor, inasmuch as it was our privilege to be baptized in infancy; but there are none of us who can pretend to doubt what kind of life our Christian profession requires of us, or what it is that we have by this profession renounced. Our Christian instinct tells us much, our religious instructors will have told us more, and our own experience of the dangers and temptations which most beset us will go far to complete our knowledge. It is neither possible nor necessary to go through a catalogue of these things in detail; it will be enough to speak of them in general terms. What

then is the great difference between the two lives which are represented as so diametrically opposed to each other that one is the other's death?—between the life of unregenerate human nature, and the life unto which we were born again in Baptism, the life of the true Christian? The great difference is this, that the sole object of the first is to please oneself, while the sole object of the latter is to please God.

The world cries out to us—and when I say *the world*, I mean those who have chosen for themselves the natural life of the concupiscences which Christ came to destroy;—clever people many of them, people highly educated, scientific, well able to argue and persuade; agreeable people too, pleasant people, winning and amiable; nay, even philanthropists, perhaps, bent upon convincing others of what is best for their happiness;—well, these cry out to us by their words and by their example—"The principal object in life is one's present happiness. Educate yourselves certainly, because educated pleasures are more exquisite than uneducated. Are you ambitious? feed your ambition. Are you fond of money? toil and spare not, and you shall have your fill. Are you fond of idle pleasures? follow them as far as means and health permit, and only moderate your pursuit as prudence shall dictate in order to insure their continuance. Has any one given you cause of offence? take the first favourable opportunity of indulging your revenge, and of punishing the offender, that he may not annoy you again. Does any one seem likely to be useful in amusing you, in ministering to your pleasures or your ambition, attach

him to you by fair words and a gift or two, perhaps, but take care always to keep him dependent on you. Above all, keep out of earshot of the Priests, and all their nonsense about self-denial. They make fools of those who listen to them, and steal away their brains. It stands to reason that while we are in this world we are right to make the most of it, and enjoy it as much as we can." These are the maxims of the world, my brethren, and of those clever agreeable people I spoke of. They fall in, you see, with our natural inclinations and desires, but there is one unfortunate fallacy that runs through them all—they ignore God, they make no account of Him, they do not take Him into consideration. Now this is a fatal omission ; for when God is left out by men, He generally steps in for Himself and upsets all their calculations. These maxims would be all very well *if there were no God*. But in that case, where would this world be, and all these clever people too? They will not, perhaps, assert there is no God, though there are some miserable men who do, led rather by their wishes than by their reason, because they see plainly what ruin must await themselves from His just anger. Most of them, however, will not go so far as this ; they will content themselves with never mentioning Him, and acting as if they were their own creators.

Here, then, is the great difference between them and us—us who have died to the world in our Baptism, and have risen again with Christ to live His life. Our object is not to please ourselves, is not to indulge and pamper our natural inclinations

and appetites, is not to seek our greater happiness in this life: our object is to please God our Creator, and to conform ourselves to our utmost to His will, as declared to us by Christ our Lord. And what is His will? His will, St. Paul tells us, is our sanctification, *i.e.*, that we should prepare ourselves in this life for eternal life with Him in Heaven. This is the end for which He created us, this is the end for which He placed us here. Is it *we* who are the fools for inquiring and finding out what our Creator wishes and trying to do it when we have found it out? Or are *they* the fools for putting Him out of consideration, and consulting only the present desires and immediate cravings of their own natural constitution? Priests do indeed talk to you of self-denial, but it is certainly no invention of theirs. Our Lord's own words are too plain to be misunderstood—"Unless a man deny himself he cannot be My disciple." If then we did not speak to you of self-denial, we should be betraying our trust and should be deceiving you. It is not, however, that Christ insists upon self-denial as a good in itself. In this point the Christian religion is slandered and misrepresented by those clever people whose maxims we heard just now. It is not as a good in itself that it is necessary, but as the only means of attaining Heaven. We are put in this world by our Creator for the sake of preparing for eternal life in Heaven. Do we, can we, prepare for Heaven by attaching ourselves to earth? And if we left ourselves alone, would not our natural inclinations and tendencies lead us to attach ourselves to earth, to earthly goods and pleasures? Is it not

then as clear as reason can make it, even to our natural intellect, that if we mean to get to Heaven, we must not leave ourselves alone, that is, we must not allow our natural inclinations and passions to attach us to the earth and its enjoyments, or in other words, that we must restrain these desires and inclinations, and deny them their gratification here. Here, then, lies the necessity of self-denial, in the essential antagonism between heaven and earth, and the absolute obligation we are under of remembering and preparing for our eternal life, while in the presence of so many inducements to forget it.

And here, my brethren, it seems to me just possible that the thought may cross the minds of some—"Why speak to-day of self-denial? That is a topic for another time, for a time of penance, not for a festival like Easter. For Easter, the theme should be a joyful one, not one to chill the soul." Now this would be entirely to misapprehend my meaning and the nature and effect of Christian self-denial. It is not necessarily connected with penance at all. Penance is in the way of punishment for sin committed, whereas self-denial is for the avoidance of sin hereafter. Is there any penance, anything to chill the soul, in avoiding sin? Far from cramping the soul, self-denial rather frees it from burdens and chains, by lessening the power of temptation. Far from chilling it, it cheers it rather, by directing its gaze to God and opening it to the genial influence of His grace. Let not a Christian's heart sink then when he hears the word, but rather leap at the sound because it reminds him of his home. We are to deny

ourselves here, because this is not our home ; we are to avoid the entanglements of earthly joys, lest we forget the joys of Heaven that await us ; we are to refrain from attaching ourselves to material things, lest we grow to a distaste of spiritual things. And the Resurrection of Christ seems to me the most fitting time of all to recall these thoughts. For on this day our minds are raised to a contemplation of our Lord's glory in Heaven, a glory which He calls us all to share, while He points out the only path by which we can reach it. Let us remind ourselves, as St. Paul exhorts us, that we are risen with Christ, and have taken His yoke upon us, and that we must fix our hearts and minds, therefore, on the things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God. Let us measure ourselves by our brethren the Saints who have gone before us, not by the worldlings who live in the world by our side. We are co-heirs with Christ, we must show ourselves worthy of our station. We are children of God, we must not degenerate from our high birth. God, Who has sanctified us, expects us to correspond to the graces He has given, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world. Christ our Redeemer expects this care from us, in return for the bitter Passion He underwent for our salvation. The Saints, our brethren, who intercede for us, and who are no uninterested spectators of our course, they too expect us to be firm and courageous in our resolves. The Angels also, our guardians and helpers, zealous for God's glory, expect us to strive for the same end. Nor are these all, my brethren. The world, too, expects great things from us. It

knows that we profess a holier law, and it expects our conduct to square with our professions; it is scandalized, and justly so, when it finds us no better than itself. Nay, I will go farther,—the very devils expect more from us than from others; they expect more difficulty in prevailing with us, they expect more resistance to their temptations, and a better insight into their deceits. Let them find what they expect, and more than they expect; let them find us absolutely impenetrable to their suggestions. Meet them with this thought, “I am a child of God, bought with the Blood of Jesus, how can I do this wickedness and sin against my God? I am an heir of Heaven, it is simply out of the question that I should listen to you, and forego my birthright. I am a Christian and a Catholic, and I am determined to love holiness and to continue loving it, to hate iniquity and to continue hating it.”

Let us lift up our hearts as the Church tells us—*Sursum corda*—and strengthen them with these high thoughts I have put before you. Let us not think that God deals hardly with us in requiring self-denial from us, but let us rather remember that it is our pride, our glory, to keep free from sin; that we owe it to ourselves, to the dignity to which God has raised us, to keep all chance of sinning at arm's length. And let us lift up our eyes too, as well as our hearts, to where Christ our Lord sits on the right hand of God, encouraging us by voice and help, and look forward to seeing His Blessed Face with its smile of approving love as He receives us with joyful welcome into Paradise.

SERMON V.

EASTER SUNDAY, 1873.

ROM. vi. 9.

Christus a mortuis resurgens jam non moritur, mors illi ultra non dominabitur.

Christ rising from the dead dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over Him.

THERE can surely be no Christian who does not feel joy at Easter. Let him only turn his thoughts ever so little to the circumstances of the time, let him direct but the briefest and most transient glance of the mind to the great historical event which we commemorate to-day, and he will surely feel his heart expand, though it may be but for a moment, with a thrill of joy and gratitude. Whatever other reasons he may have for grief, whatever troubles, real or imaginary (and imaginary troubles often distress us more than real ones), may be weighing on his heart, the joy of Easter will outweigh them all. The joy of Easter is not like earthly joy, given to one and refused to another, it is for every one—every one who wishes for it. None are excluded from it but such as exclude themselves. It is like the sun that shines for the evil as for the good ; like the rain that falls for the just and for the unjust. Yes ;

there is joy at Easter for the sinner, for the Resurrection of Christ tells him that his ransom has been paid and accepted, and that his Saviour has returned with his pardon in His hand, which he has but to ask for and receive. There is joy especially for the just, for the Resurrection of Christ reminds them of the pardon and the graces they have received, and reminds them also of that resurrection to eternal glory which is in store for them, and of which their Lord's Resurrection is the pledge and the example. There is of course another source of joy for all who love our Lord, in the thought that His Passion is past, His sufferings ended, and His glory come. But neither is it possible for the human heart, nor does our Lord Himself wish us, to dwell on this thought alone. He will have us always remember that the glory He has won He won for men, that His victory over death was gained for men, and that this victory and this glory is as nothing to Him if men do not share it with Him. This is why He retains even in His glory the marks of His humiliation, those precious signs of His Passion, His five adorable wounds. It is to convince us that His Sacred Heart is still overflowing with the same love for us as that which burst it on the Cross; it is to show us that He glories in what He suffered for our sakes, and that if it were necessary, He would again come down and suffer afresh for our salvation; that if it were necessary, He would be ready again to endure the scourge and the thorns, the nails and the spear, were it only to save a single soul, and insure it that eternal happiness for which it was created. He

would be ready to suffer and die for us again if it were necessary! God be thanked, it is not necessary. The infinite value of that one great sacrifice atoned for all the sins of men, past, present, and to come; nor is there any sin, however heinous, that has not had its pardon won for it effectually on the Cross. But let us suppose for a moment, my brethren, that the renewal of our Lord's Passion could be rendered necessary by fresh sins of men. Suppose it were possible that for the salvation of men, or for that of a single soul, it could be necessary for our Lord again to suffer the death of the Cross,—what could be said, what could be thought, of those who should so act as to make it necessary? What execration could be too strong, what condemnation too severe for such cruel perfidy, such detestable ingratitude? And yet, my brethren, this is precisely what we do when we commit new sins; we are doing all we can to make it necessary that Christ should die again, if it were possible; we are doing all we can to bring Him down from Heaven to the scourge and Cross again. Do you think I am exaggerating? No; I have warrant for what I say. Does not St. Paul use even stronger language than what I have used? Does he not say of those who commit fresh sins, that they “crucify again to themselves the Son of God, and make a mockery of Him?”* Yes, this is what we do when we sin afresh; we do all we can, all that in us lies, to make Christ's past Passion useless, and to make a new Passion necessary. Thanks be to God, though men do all they can to

* Heb. vi. 6.

crucify the Son of God again, yet in this they can never actually succeed. "Christ rising from the dead dieth now no more, death shall have no more dominion over Him." What then must we do, my brethren? We must make our Lord's Resurrection, which is to be the model of our resurrection to the life of glory,—we must make it also the model of our resurrection to the life of grace. This is what St. Paul urges on us in the passage I have taken for my text, that our resurrection from sin should be like Christ's Resurrection especially in this—that as death has no more dominion over Him after His Resurrection, so sin should have no more dominion over us when we have recovered the life of grace.

Four miracles of raising the dead to life is our Lord Jesus recorded to have wrought. There may have been more, for St. John tells us that comparatively little has been recorded of what our Lord said and did. Four have been recorded, and we may discern a kind of gradation in the four. The first case was that of the ruler's daughter, our Lord arriving immediately after the maid's death, and restoring her at once to life. In the second case, that of the widow's son at Nain, the young man had been some time dead, and was being carried forth to burial. Him also our Lord restored to his widowed mother, to the intense amazement of the people, who cried out, "This is indeed the Prophet that should come into the world." The third instance was that of Lazarus, who had been dead four days, and had been buried three. This miracle created still more

astonishment, for there could be no doubt that putrefaction had set in. The fourth was the noblest and most astounding miracle of all, when our Lord Jesus, by His Almighty power, raised Himself at once to life, re-uniting His blessed Soul and Body, and endowing them with all the gifts of glory, which belonged to them now by a double title,—first, in virtue of the hypostatic union, and secondly, in virtue of His blessed life and death. Now any one of these four resurrections might be applied as an example of the resurrection of the sinner from the death of sin to the life of grace, and often in meditations and in sermons are they so applied. But St. Paul passes by the three first, and compares the sinner's resurrection to the Resurrection of Christ Himself. And why? Between the first three resurrections and the fourth there is this wide and ineffaceable distinction, that though Lazarus, and the widow's son, and the ruler's daughter, were all raised from life to death, yet they died again. But "Christ rising from the dead dieth no more, death shall have no more dominion over Him." Yes, my brethren, this is to be our model. Not the resurrection of Lazarus, for Lazarus died again. Not the resurrection of the ruler's daughter, or of the widow's son, for though raised from death, yet they had a second death to die. The Resurrection of Christ is to be our model, over Whom from that time death had no more dominion. Such must be our case. Once raised to the life of grace, to persevere in it to the end, nor allow the death of sin to have any more dominion over us.

In the words that I addressed to you from this place last year, my brethren, I insisted chiefly on the fact of the Christian life being a new life, utterly different from the life of the world, different in its principles and maxims, in its aims and motives; and I showed that St. Paul used our Lord's Resurrection as an illustration of this difference, for that as our Lord's risen life, glorious, immortal, impassible, was different from his mortal and passible life, so the Christian's life, after his resurrection with Christ in Baptism, was to be quite distinct and different from what it was before, or what it would have been without. In what I have said to-day I have pursued one particular point in this comparison—viz., that as Christ has never lost, and will never lose, His glorious life, so the Christian life of grace must never be lost by us. I may be allowed, however, to revert briefly to the general subject, if it be only to point out certain precautions which will materially conduce to the preservation of our Christian life.

Every one knows, not only from what he hears, and sees, and reads, but also from his own experience, from what he feels within himself, that there are two great antagonistic systems or principles, struggling for the mastery in mankind. One system takes God's law, God's will, for the guide of life, and teaches us to abhor everything that would in the slightest way tend to draw us away from God's law, or make us forget that our object is to please Him, and win a place in Heaven. The other system takes temporal motives for its guide, motives of temporal interest, pleasure, or expediency; it tells men to

please themselves, it ignores God's law altogether, puts it completely out of sight, and looks upon all thoughts of a future life as a nuisance and a bore. Now the first of these represents the temper of mind produced and fostered by God's true religion in the hearts of men, the spirit of submission to God, our Creator and our end, submission of the intellect by faith, submission of the will by obedience; it is, in a word, the Christian principle, the principle that must animate all those who have risen with Christ, who claim to live His new life, and call themselves by His name. The other we may call the spirit of Paganism, the spirit of independence, recognizing no authority in intellectual matters but the finite intellect itself, and in matters of conduct looking only to temporal interest or pleasure.

Now it is of the utmost consequence, it is absolutely essential to the preservation of the Christian spirit, that we should clearly and distinctly recognize in what it consists, and how diametrically opposed it is to the spirit of Paganism or the world. "We have received," St. Paul tells us, "not the spirit of this world, but the spirit that is of God, that we may know the things that are given us from God."* It behoves us, therefore, to recognize the difference of our position from that of those who have not this spirit, who take the other road. It is necessary, I say, because we live among them, and if we are not keenly alive to this difference between us, a difference which must and ought to be maintained, we run the risk of being influenced by them, insensibly perhaps,

* 1 Cor. ii. 12.

in the wrong direction. By their example, or by their arguments, by their amiability perhaps, or by their sarcasms, the edge of our Christian spirit may come to be blunted, the keenness of our Christian eyesight dimmed, and we may quit our hold of one after another of our Christian privileges, until we lose the whole. We live among them, we find them often pleasant, agreeable and well educated; and it is essential, I repeat, for the safety of our souls, for the security of that higher life which God has given us, to remember that we are made of other stuff than they are, that we have other ends in view. It is essential to remember that, however we may trust them in the affairs of this life, in business or in friendship; however in these things we may rely (as most certainly we mostly may rely) on their honour, honesty, and goodwill, yet the moment there arises the smallest question that touches on the next life, that touches on our religion or our conscience, then we have other principles to guide us, another standard to judge by, than what they have. Here we can trust them no longer, but must stand aloof, for these are things that human powers alone will never judge rightly of. "The natural man," St. Paul tells us, "perceiveth not those things that are of the Spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand."* We see a hand they cannot see that points the way for us; we hear a voice they cannot hear that instructs us in God's secret, the secret He has hidden from the wise of this world, and revealed only to the simple. We must stand

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.

upon our privilege, then, in this matter, and recognize the irreconcilable difference that exists, and must exist, between what we *know* and what they *think*. We have nothing to learn from them in matters of religion and conscience; but we occupy a firm and unassailable vantage-ground, from which no power can dislodge us, if we are but faithful to ourselves and to our position. We may perhaps hear in conversation, or we may see in reading, arguments which run counter to the truth, and which we do not see at once how to refute. What matter? What is it to us? The principles by which we walk do not depend on argument, and cannot be destroyed by argument. They depend upon authority, on the external teaching of Christ's Church, which is answered in our hearts by that interior grace, in virtue of which we cry, Abba, Father—*i.e.*, by which we are made children of God. These principles may indeed be defended by argument, they may be confirmed by argument; and it is well for us if by the diligent study of our religion we are able so to defend and confirm them; but the strength by which we hold them comes not from argument, but from God, God without us and God within us, God's voice teaching us through the Church, and God's gift within us, whereby we embrace that teaching with the supernatural grasp of faith.

Yes, the difference is irreconcilable, and must always so remain; there are times, however, when it grows to something more than difference on the part of the world—when it becomes enmity, often cruel unrelenting enmity and persecution. It has

become so now in foreign countries, especially in Italy and Germany; and there are not wanting symptoms that such may come to be the case even in our own free, fair, and tolerant England. Well, my brethren, if that should be so, if such times should ever come again, we must remember that our fathers underwent worse things for their faith and conscience than are ever likely to befall us. Let us only remember our privileges, and where lies our strength, and the victory will be ours. Whose was the victory when they slew our Lord? Who were the conquerors, the slayers or the Slain? "In patience," He tells us, "shall ye possess your souls." And again—"Have confidence; I have overcome the world." He is our model, as I said before; our model in our death to sin, our model in our resurrection to the life of grace.

And let us cast our eyes back for a moment, in conclusion, to the conditions on which this life of grace was given us. It was not given to us to be lost again, but to last for ever. Nay, it was given us only on our promise not to allow it to be lost, but to guard and keep it for ever unimpaired. It was given us on our petition for it, and we asked for it with the intention of keeping it for ever. What then is to prevent our absolute perseverance in this life of grace, after the model of Christ's glorious life, over which death has no more dominion? It is a life that of itself will never fade, and we have God's promise that He will do His part to maintain it in us. Our perseverance in it, therefore, depends upon our own will. Let us then strengthen our will

by renewing our resolutions, and offering them with fresh earnestness to our glorified Lord when He descends upon our altar this morning, protesting to Him our determination to make His Resurrection the model of ours, so that the death of sin may have no more dominion over us. May our Lord Jesus ratify and confirm these resolutions, and grant that all here present who are now assembled to honour His Resurrection upon earth, may come also to share His glory in Heaven !

SERMON VI.

CORPUS CHRISTI.

1 COR. xi. 26.

Quotiescumque enim manducabitis panem hunc, et calicem bibetis, mortem Domini annuntiabitis donec veniat,

For as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, you shall show the death of the Lord until He come.

TWICE in the year do we make special commemoration of the institution of the Holy Mass and the Blessed Sacrament—once on Maundy Thursday, and then again to-day, the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. True indeed it is, that we commemorate this admirable mystery every day when Mass is said, nay, at each particular Mass that is offered; so constantly is this pledge of our Lord's love brought before us, so intimately is it interwoven into our daily lives. But on the two festivals I have mentioned the commemoration is more direct and more entire; yet there is an essential difference between them, which prevents either from being superfluous. On Maundy Thursday, coming as it does in Holy Week, the institution of the Mass is celebrated as the first act of our Lord's Passion, as being a compendium of the whole Passion, and as making that Passion present to all future ages

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with all its fruits and graces. It is the idea of our Lord's sufferings that is exclusively presented to us in that celebration. But there is certainly another aspect in which the institution of the mystery of the Blessed Eucharist may be viewed, which would scarcely be congenial to the sad and penitential character of the first celebration. We may truly look on Christ's Passion, not only as full of suffering for Him, but also as full of hope for us; not only as causing His death, but as causing our life; not only as caused by our sins, but as redeeming us from their punishment and strengthening us against their recurrence. There is necessarily therefore in the Mass, even considered as a compendium of the Passion, an aspect of joy as well as of sorrow, a motive for gladness as well as for compunction. This second point of view then, which is more or less excluded from the celebration of Maundy Thursday, the actual anniversary of the institution, demands another opportunity. It is for this that the Church has appointed this second celebration of the mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ, and calls upon all her children scattered over the face of the earth to unite in hearty adoration and joyful thanksgiving to their Lord and Saviour, ever residing among them in His Incarnate Presence; to renew their faith in this glorious mystery, to renew their love of their hidden Redeemer, and offer their lives afresh to His service. In reviewing the immense benefits which accrue to us from the Blessed Eucharist, there are three distinct characters in which it presents itself to our thoughts,—

first as a Sacrifice, secondly as a Sacrament, and thirdly as the abiding Presence of Jesus Christ among His people. Volumes have been written, and fresh volumes will be written on each of these heads; it is evident therefore that in a brief discourse I can but touch on them in a summary way. Yet perhaps the bare enumeration of some of the more obvious benefits that the Blessed Eucharist confers upon us, is more calculated to inflame our hearts with love and gratitude than an elaborate development of a single one.

First, then, let us consider it as a Sacrifice.

I. As a sacrifice it was instituted by our Lord Jesus, for the purpose of perpetuating through all ages His one sacrifice of Himself, of giving His faithful people throughout all time the consolation of being present at that sacrifice no less truly than those blessed souls who stood under the Cross of Death. When we hear Mass we are as truly present as they at the great Sacrifice of the Son of God, but we have the consolation, which they had not, of knowing that it is not now a sacrifice of pain, a sacrifice of blood; that character has passed away once for all on Calvary, and it remains only what it was then also, a sacrifice of love and grace. The sacrifice is the same, for the Victim is the same—the Eternal Son of God; all that is changed is the mode or manner of the sacrifice. There is no longer any actual bloodshedding, and yet the bloodshedding of the Passion is forcibly represented in the Mass. For if it is true to call what is on the corporal after the consecration the Body of Christ (and faith teaches us that it is),—if it is true

to call what is in the chalice after consecration the Blood of Christ (and again faith teaches us that it is),—then it necessarily follows that the Blood of Christ by the very force of the words of consecration, is represented to us in the Mass as in some sense separate from the Body, though not in the same way, nor in the same sense that it was separated in His Passion. His death too—which St. Paul tells us we show forth as often as Mass is celebrated—His death is no longer actual in the sense of a separation of soul and body, but yet there is a terrible reality in that mystical death which constitutes the sacrifice of the Mass. There are other deaths besides that to which we chiefly give the name, the separation of soul and body. A person may be in a true sense dead to the world, though still living this mortal life ; so also, unhappy truth, he may be dead to God though still alive to the world. We speak of it as a sort of death to be immured in a dungeon where the light of heaven has no access, and the human voice is never heard. We call it a sort of death if a man is struck with a helpless palsy, or lies destitute of sense or feeling, though the pulsation of his heart still proclaims that the soul has not left her tenement. And how then shall it not be a death for the Eternal Son of God, Incarnate, and in His human nature enjoying the full glory of the Divinity, to be imprisoned in the accidents of bread and wine, to be hidden, impenetrably hidden, under the outward semblance of mere dead matter, to be rendered,—as He is in the Blessed Eucharist, even though it be by His own omnipotent fiat,—to be rendered helpless,

motionless; to be shorn, in fact, of all external attributes, even of His human nature. St. Paul calls His becoming Man an annihilation; what then must this be called, when He hides Himself under the appearance, and submits to all the external conditions of what is immeasurably below the standard of human nature, mere dead matter. Those indeed who refuse to believe this life-giving truth of our Lord's Presence in the Eucharist, speak of it as a degrading doctrine, unworthy of the majesty of God. Why do they not speak so of the Incarnation? Some, indeed, do so speak of it; those who renounce the name of Christian altogether justify their refusal to believe that God became Man by the argument that it would be a degradation to the Divinity. These, indeed, are so far consistent in their disbelief; and these, when it is necessary, we have other means of refuting. But those who believe St. John when he tells them that the "Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," why do they refuse to believe this Word made flesh when He tells them, "This is My Body, this is My Blood"? And we, my brethren, what do we say about it? Do we deny it is a degradation? No, we cannot. But we say, "He Who did not disdain to become Man for our sake has not disdained a still further, a still deeper degradation when He thought He could benefit us by submitting to it." And we say again with St. Bernard, *Quanto pro me vilior tanto mihi carior*—"The more He has lowered Himself for me, the dearer to me shall He be." And as for the fact, we take His blessed words as

they sound, in their plain and obvious meaning, and believe them in the simplicity of our faith, saying as St. Peter, "Lord, to whom else shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Yes, it is a degradation, it is a death; for if to become Man was annihilation for the Son of God, what less can we call this further degradation than a death? It is a death, it is a sacrifice—a sacrifice that brings Calvary down to our times with all its fruits and graces, but without its pain and sufferings. This is that pure sacrifice spoken of by the Prophet Malachi, which he foretold should be offered from the rising of the sun to its going down, *i.e.*, all over the earth, from east to west. Woe to the world if it were not for this sacrifice; woe to the world could this sacrifice ever cease! For surely there is more need than ever of daily propitiatory sacrifice. When we think of the constant course of sins that reek up from earth to heaven without intermission, day and night, what could stay the visitation of God's vengeance but this daily acceptable sacrifice of His beloved Son? It is of course true that the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary atoned for all the sins of mankind, but it is still true that these present daily sins do freshly and newly offend the purity of God, and to appease this fresh offence the death of His Son has to be freshly and newly presented to him in a sacrificial way. And blessed and praised for ever be our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, as it were, forgetting His own glory, and mindful and careful only of His people, has in loving wisdom devised so powerful and universal a means as this. For as

it is, alas, certain that there is never a moment of the day or night in which God is not being offended by one or other of His creatures, so is it certain also that there is no moment of the day or night, as years roll on, in which this pure and acceptable sacrifice of His Son's death is not being celebrated somewhere on the surface of the earth. So that in this sacrifice our Lord Jesus is always interposing between sinners and their punishment. Oh, loving heart of our God! How can we thank Thee, how requite Thee for this undying love? Let us, at least, my brethren, renew our devotion to Holy Mass, hear it as often as we can, as devoutly as we can.

II. But the Blessed Eucharist, whose institution we commemorate to-day, was established by our Lord, not only as a sacrifice, but as a Sacrament. A sacrament, the Catechism tells us, is an external means of conveying internal grace to the soul. This Sacrament of sacraments, however, does more; it conveys to our soul not only grace, but the Author of Grace; not only strength and life, but the very Source itself of strength and life. This truth is so familiar to us from our earliest childhood that there is some danger of our not realizing it as we should. We may perhaps from time to time, in reading or hearing the Gospel narrative of our Lord's life and miracles, we may have envied those who lived at that time and in that place, who heard His voice, who looked on His face, who saw His miracles. Envy them! Oh, my brethren, there is not one of them who would not rather, and with infinitely greater reason, have envied us, if they could

have known what we should enjoy over and above what they had. No doubt it would be a satisfaction and delight to have His visible presence among us, but it would be at the expense of infinitely greater privileges. How many of those who heard and saw our Lord during His mortal life were converted by what they saw and heard? No doubt multitudes were struck, multitudes were attracted by His words and hung upon His lips; nor can we question that God's grace was then working in their hearts. But when we come to examine how many preserved those seeds of grace then sown, how many were permanently converted, we can almost count them on our fingers; and who shall say that even these would have held constant to the end had they not received later on this privilege of privileges—the Holy Communion. But since the institution of the Blessed Eucharist, since the visible presence of Jesus Christ has been replaced by His sacramental presence, who shall number the millions of the Faithful who have persevered to the end and obtained a crown of life? Count the sands on the sea-shore, count the myriad stars of heaven, and you will fall far short of their multitude. Yes, it is by interior sanctity we are saved, and even Christ's own words sounding in our ears, Christ's own example acted before our eyes, is not to be compared, in efficacy of grace to sanctify us, to that interior presence which He accords us in Holy Communion. Thereby, if we will but let Him, He enters as King into our hearts, and establishes there His throne; thereby, if we will but let Him, He unites Himself to us in

such an intimate personal union as to give us His own strength to act with, His own thoughts to think with, nay, His own life to live with. Do not think that these are exaggerated words ; for any one who has received Christ worthily in Holy Communion and puts no obstacle to the efficacy of His blessed presence may unquestionably say with St. Paul, "It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me." Again, to carry on the contrast a little further, our Lord's visible presence during His mortal life was indeed a blessing, but it was a general blessing, as the Incarnation itself, or indeed even the sacrifice of the Mass ; they benefit mankind as a whole, and whatever good reaches each individual directly from these general benefits, reaches him only as one of a multitude. But the love of Jesus Christ is not content with this. He would come Himself to each one, to bring His own gifts Himself to each, and not merely scatter them broadcast for us to gather. He loves His people, not as an earthly king may do, loving them only in the mass as a nation, without personal knowledge, and therefore without personal love for each one individually. It is not so our Divine King loves His people ; it is not so our Divine Shepherd loves His sheep. But as He Himself says, "I know My sheep, and call them each by their name." He knows each one, and loves each one personally, and has therefore devised a plan whereby He may come and unite Himself in the most intimate union with each one of His sheep. Nay, in order that He may not miss any one of His sheep He refuses not even to give Himself to wolves when they come in sheep's

clothing. O loving heart of our God, how can we thank Thee! How requite this undying love of Thine! At least, my brethren, let us think more of this when we prepare ourselves for Holy Communion, and yield our hearts as perfectly as possible to His adorable and loving will.

III. But besides being a Sacrifice and a Sacrament, the Blessed Eucharist is also the perpetual abiding Presence of our Lord among His people. Here again, my brethren, if we contrast our privileges with those of the Jews who lived at the same time with our Lord, and enjoyed the benefit of His visible presence among them, and His personal teaching, we shall find that the advantage is greatly on our side. How many of all mankind who were then living ever got to see Him? How many even knew of His existence? Few, indeed. His bodily presence was confined to Palestine, a small strip of country, not half so large as England, and not half as populous; and even of those who inhabited this small country to which our Lord's presence was confined, how few could ever obtain personal communication with Him, during the three years that He was publicly known? But now, by means of the Blessed Eucharist, devised by His unquenchable love for men, He is present not only in one country, not only in one spot in each country, but in every Catholic church, wherever two or three are gathered together in His name—*i.e.*, as a Catholic congregation with a Catholic Priest—there is He in the midst of them. If we go to the utmost ends of the earth we find Him there before us, as ready to receive us

as at home, to welcome us, to cheer us, to console us, as desirous for our love and worship, and as forward as ever to answer to our prayers. This, then, is His motto for all time, *Deliciæ meæ esse cum filiis hominum*—"My delight is to be with the sons of men." And, my brethren, let us ask ourselves, What should we do without His presence in the Eucharist? We are so accustomed to it, we so confidently count upon it, we take it so for granted, that the immensity of the benefit never strikes us till we come to think, "What should we do without it?" Yet, alas, on the other hand, how much neglect and forgetfulness have we to accuse ourselves of with regard to it? How often do we remain in our Lord's presence without realizing where we are, and let our thoughts wander away anywhere but to Him Who is waiting eagerly in His voluntary imprisonment for our sake, waiting eagerly for a word, or a thought of recognition and devotion from us. How often do we genuflect to Him carelessly and thoughtlessly, while His Sacred Heart is full of thoughts of us, yearning for our love and pained at our neglect. How bitterly have we disappointed Him, Who looks to His own people at least for due recognition and requital for His affection, and for some compensation to Him for the outrages and indignities He suffers at the hands of those who reject Him. Oh, when we think of this, who is there who must not beat His breast in compunction for the past, and renew his fealty and allegiance for the future. Let us all and each, when we bow our heads in adoration as the Son

of God descends upon the altar,—let us all and each adore Him in our hearts, and lay ourselves in spirit at His feet in acknowledgment and thanksgiving for the benefits we receive from His blessed presence in the Holy Eucharist.

SERMONS

BY THE

REV. EDWARD IGNATIUS PURBRICK,

Of the Society of Jesus.

SERMON VII.

GRANDEUR AND BEAUTY OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

ST. JOHN i. 14.

Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis.

The Word was made Flesh and dwelt amongst us.

WE believe that in the most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist are contained truly, really, and substantially the Body and Blood, with the Soul and Divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe that in the Eucharist is wrought a wonderful change or conversion of the whole substance of the bread and the whole substance of the wine, so that there is under the same appearances of bread and wine the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. And this conversion the Church has rightly named Transubstantiation.

We believe that in this adorable Sacrament, Jesus Christ is contained, whole and entire, and is really present under the appearances of bread and wine, and under each of their parts.

We believe that the sacrifice of the Mass is properly and truly a sacrifice offered to God.

We believe that by virtue of the divine words pronounced in the consecration at the altar, the

mystery is accomplished, that Jesus Christ becomes present, is offered as Victim, and dwells as the divine nourishment of our souls.

Such is the Holy Eucharist—Sacrament and Sacrifice. Such is the Catholic faith concerning it, as defined by the Council of Trent. I am not going now to set about proving this great truth, for there is no one amongst you, my Catholic brethren, who doubts it or any portion of it. But I will ask you to contemplate with me the grandeur and beauty of this great dogma. For the Eucharist is at once the highest reality of our faith, and the most sublime and touching expression of the love of God made Man. By it the Incarnation is continued, unceasingly renewed, luminously set forth before us. What can be grander? By it Jesus makes the union of our souls with God intimate and perfect. What can be more tenderly beautiful?

I. The Incarnation was a stupendous mystery. At quiet midnight in a little room of a poor cottage, conspicuously poor even in the obscure hamlet of Nazareth, when all men, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, white and black, learned and ignorant, were dreaming of anything but this, the Almighty Word of God, in accordance with a decree which His infinite wisdom alone could have devised or even guessed to be possible, came down, and in a moment when the lowly Maiden whom He had chosen spoke her "fiat," the Holy Ghost, the substantial Love of the Father and the Son, formed a body from Mary's blood, and a human soul

sprang from nothing and animated that body, and both were assumed by the Eternal Word into hypostatic union with Himself, so that He was one Person with two natures, divine and human, living and dwelling—He the Eternal God—as a man with man. *Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis.* Surely this is a stupendous fact. The Eternal begins to be in time; the Immense clothes Himself with littleness; Almighty strength becomes infant weakness; the supreme Lord of all things takes on Him the form of a servant; the Invisible and Intangible becomes an object of sight and touch; the Word is made flesh.

Stupendous is this fact also as the mystery of divine condescension. Lucifer had said: *Ascendam et similis Altissimo ero.* God the Word says: *Descendam et similis infimo ero.* He empties Himself, such is the not too strong expression of St. Paul, of the glory He had with His Father from eternity before all things began. And when? After sin; after the revolt of man against Himself. And why? On account of sin; “that where sin abounded, grace might yet more abound.” God the Word, I say, thus stoops, thus being infinite identifies Himself with the finite, bridging over the chasm between the Creator and the creature, to raise man to union with Himself, to make sinful man partaker of His own divine nature. This was the rising of the Sun of Justice upon the sin-darkened world. Surely this is sufficient for the regeneration of the whole human family. Surely His rays have power to reach all the nations which sat in the shadow of death; to

touch and revivify all souls ; to light up all ages ; to radiate life through all times and places. Its efficacy was not momentary or transient. The grace of Jesus Christ, the God-Man, is always powerful, always ready. It might seem as if so grand a fact should remain solitary and unique, without a successor, as it was without a precedent.

Had there, however, been no continuation or renewal of the mystery, such is the heedlessness and forgetfulness of man with regard to supernatural truth, that this mystery, stupendous as it was, might have, probably would have, passed into at least practical oblivion ; and, instead of being a living reality for all, have dwindled down into a dead historical memory for the learned few. Faith, at any rate, would have had a greater effort to make in order to realize the distant past, as it would have had no refuge or support in the present. We should have been as thirsty men sitting beside the dry bed of an ancient river, full of dismay at the difficulty of finding its source, there to drink its life-giving waters.

God, then, Who is rich in mercy and loved the world so as not merely to lend, but give, His only Son for the regeneration of mankind, did not thus, if I may say so, practically revoke His gift. Another invention lay in the storehouse of His infinite wisdom. Another stretch of love was possible to Him. His delight was to be with the children of men. His wisdom and His love together solved the problem. Though the God-Man was to die, and after His resurrection to leave the earth

without His natural presence, that in His glorified human nature He might sit for ever in Heaven at the right hand of His Father, yet by a new and not less stupendous wonder, He designed to abide with man on earth, by a supernatural presence, for ever. He invented the adorable Sacrament of the Eucharist.

In most touching words our Lord gave promise of the mystery. "I (the Incarnate Word) am the Bread of life. He that cometh to Me shall no longer hunger, and he that believeth in Me shall never thirst." That was not enough for His loving Heart to say. He added: "My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh my Blood abideth in Me and I in him." And yet again: "He that eateth this Bread shall live for ever."

Such was the promise; and its fulfilment came that night, in recording the acts of which the Evangelist says, "Having loved His own, He loved them to the end." For at the last Paschal supper, "He took bread, and giving thanks, blessed it and broke and gave to His disciples, saying: Take, eat, this is My Body which is given for you: do this in memory of Me."

Thus He instituted the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, which, as the holy Eucharistic Sacrifice, was to be renewed daily, and last throughout all ages. Thus the extension of His Incarnation was assured for ever. Thus He lives truly, really, and substantially amongst men, beneath the sacramental veil, in all churches of the Catholic universe, until

the consummation of all things. *Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis.*

It is, indeed, only by the light of a watchful and keen-eyed faith that we can recognize this glorious mystery; but we have that light, and by it we do discover upon our altars the irrefragable reality. In the middle of the solemn sacrifice of the Mass the awful wonder is wrought, amidst the dread silence of adoring multitudes who know its truth. Yes, every head is bowed, every sound hushed, as the Faithful expect the coming of their Lord. Five little words did Mary utter and the Incarnation was a fact; five little words does the Priest pronounce in lowly whisper, and what *was* bread *is* God. It is the night at Nazareth all over again. It is the Incarnation daily renewed and brought home to our believing hearts. Who amongst us, has not felt the warmth of those beneficent rays which then stream upon us from the Sun of Justice? Who has not been refreshed by bathing in the boundless torrent of His grace? Who has not drunk with inebriating joy of these life-giving waters?

I suppose that any of us who had once heard the voice of Jesus, or caught His eye, or gazed on the divine splendours of His countenance, during His risen life on earth, would have glowed instantly with desire to follow Him whithersoever He went, and to be counted amongst His disciples and friends. That chance is not ours; for we are the children of a distant age and clime. But has our heart never burnt within us, or have we never by a secret light

seized the happiness of belonging to Him, when the tinkling bell or solemn gong announces the renewal of that same presence, though veiled from our senses, in the midst of us? Have we not felt the past rush into the present, or ourselves transported into the past at Nazareth, and how Heaven is not now too high for us, seeing that it has come down very nigh to us, and we have re-found the Saviour of our souls Who is our life, our strength, our love, our all? Or have we never rejoiced with a great joy, like that of the shepherd visitors at Bethlehem, as we knelt at other times before the tabernacle, where the ever-burning lamp told us that Jesus lay cradled to receive our adoration and our love? How is our feebleness raised and supported by the consciousness of God present, by the ever-renewed Incarnation of God the Word here, here before our eyes! Never, never, we cry, was God so near to any people as our God is to us. O Jesus, present on our altars, Thou art the most august object of our faith, Thou in the adorable Eucharist art its highest expression.

There is a hunger and thirst pressing on our souls. We seek God. We aspire after the supreme and infinite good and beauty. We do not find it in the vague illusions of our day dreams; we snatch at phantoms, and embrace nothing. When we set our hearts on vain idols, the creatures of our own imagination and fashioning, they turn out to be cruel deceptions which leave us nothing but the misery and degradation that are the constant fruits of attachment to whatever is not God. But Thou art

God, God and Man, accessible and sweet, God with us, our nourishment and life, always present, always offered and given to our souls. Is not this an admirable prodigality of divine love? Can there be anything grander or more astonishing than this?

But there is more yet. The Eucharist, with the real presence of Jesus Christ, would not be the complete continuation of the Incarnation without the permanent reality of the Sacrifice of the Cross. This the Holy Eucharist is, not with bloodshedding as in the one Sacrifice on Calvary by which we were redeemed, but accomplished without bloodshed, in all its substance and truth, by the sacrificial Priest at the altar, speaking, acting, and offering the holy victim Christ Jesus in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ, Whose representative and instrument he is. On a myriad altars daily throughout the world, till the end of time, the one sole Sacrifice of the Cross is reproduced, renewed, applied, in reality not in figure, the same in nature though not in form. Marvellous mystery! Where is our faith when we assist at Mass cold, distracted, vague, unheeding?

Take away this clean oblation; let Jesus be no longer immolated upon earth; let the tabernacle be empty and the altar useless; the Priest, a name and shadow without function, dignity, or sacred character, and how cold, how empty, how hollow would the exercise of religion become! How would the judgments of God descend upon the earth if the voice of the Blood of Jesus no longer cried for mercy from the midst of us! The sanctuary would be desolate, and the world a wilderness. Expression, dignity,

force gone from Christian worship, faith would die out, heathendom would return, and the whole human race be ready for final destruction.

But no, God be ever blessed, it is not so. Jesus is present; His life and death continue; the price of His Blood, the truth of His word, the reality of His sacrifice remain. The earth is blessed, man vivified, the Gospel realized by this continued and ever-active Incarnation.

II. Ever active and for what? Why did God become man, if not to unite man to God? Why does the God-Man live with us, offer Himself as a perpetual victim and oblation, give Himself to us as our food, if not to make the union of our souls to God intimate and perfect?

Here is a fountain of tenderness, a mystery of ineffable beauty. To form a just conception of what union with God means, we must raise our thoughts to God Himself, and contemplate that substantial and infinite love which binds in one indivisible nature the three Persons of the adorable Trinity. Unity is God Himself in His infinite truth, love, and glory. Whatever is true, beautiful, and happy is derived from that source and referable to that type. *Omnis pulchritudinis forma unitas est.** The universe at creation bore in a sovereign degree this character of beauty. Man in Paradise, by his supernatural likeness to God, was its touching and most sublime expression. He was united to God by a most perfect relationship of wisdom, truth, power, goodness, and love. There was nothing to disturb

* St. Augustine.

this divine harmony. His understanding, his heart, his inclinations, desires, were all peaceably at one with the will of the Author of his liberty and life. Before him lay the ever-blessed destiny of seeing God face to face, and embracing Him in an indissoluble union of love. Sin broke the charm. Man, severed from God by pride, became a rebel and an outcast, and the world was filled with evils and disorders. Christ came to repair the ruin by reconstituting unity. God lowered Himself to man that He might raise man again to God. The Incarnate Word redeemed man by the Cross, that He might establish an intimate, enduring, active union between man and God. To perfect and apply this work, to identify each individual man with God, as far as possible even to God, in Jesus Christ the Mediator, God and Man, one Person in two natures, the holy sacrifice of the Mass is offered. The Divine Victim, ever divine and ever living, reduces Himself to what borders on annihilation (*exinanitio* is St. Paul's word), and under the simple appearance of bread, abides upon our altars, that we may come to feed upon Him, and through Him, by no mere channel of grace, but by the indwelling of the Author of life and grace, live by His life—not we, but Christ in us.

Thus is brought about the fulfilment of our Lord's prayer before His death: *Ut sint unum sicut et nos; ut omnes unum sint; ut et ipsi in nobis unum sint; ut sint consummati in unum.* Come, says He, from the inmost depths of His most tender Heart, I will not leave you orphans; eat My Flesh;

abide in Me and I will abide in you. What mystery can be more tenderly beautiful than this ?

And now, my brethren, I leave you to your own thoughts. This only will I say : Woe to him who will not believe ; woe to him who will not feed ; woe to him that feeds unworthily. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after this food ; blessed are they who assist daily with devotion at the Holy Sacrifice ; blessed are they who cluster around His altar, who bear Him away in their breasts, who make Him in the Adorable Sacrament the centre of their hopes and love and life. They shall have all gifts of unending love. United with the Word made Flesh and dwelling amongst us, they shall be able to cry, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" They shall live for Him and by Him and in Him. Possessing Him, they shall possess eternal life. Amen.

SERMON VIII.

OUR LADY OF VICTORIES.

JUDITH xiii. 17, 18.

Laudate Dominum Deum nostrum, qui non deseruit sperantes in se: et in me ancilla sua adimplevit misericordiam suam, quam promisit domui Israel: et interfecit in manu mea hostem populi sui.

Praise ye the Lord our God, Who hath not forsaken them that hope in Him. And by me His handmaid He hath fulfilled His mercy, which He promised to the house of Israel: and He hath killed the enemy of His people by my hand this night.

THE surface of history, dear brethren in Jesus Christ, is not a record of victories gained by good over evil. The world at all times is so sorry a sight that the souls of the just are apt to vex themselves, as if the power, wisdom, and love of God had had but poor results in the government of mankind. Paradise was soon laid waste by the entrance of sin. The traditions of Eden gave way very early to wild and degrading forms of error. As has been well remarked,* the very innate yearning for God of which the human soul can never divest itself, became the parent of crime, tempting man to reverse by illicit means the curse which lay upon him. Awful rights, wild orgies, hideous mysteries, demon sacraments, became the

* J. B. Dalgairns, *The Holy Communion*, ch. iii.

main expression of man's longing for the invisible, till the very life of hell ran in the blood of all nations and fired their brains. Physical destruction followed as the penalty of moral corruption. And yet again the new race took up the old ways, and Paganism obtained for ages all but universal sway. In the fulness of time God's own Blood flowed for man, but men still crowd into the abyss which never gives up its prey. The Kingdom of Christ, cradled in blood, nursed in persecution, trained by hardships, had but a short spell of power, and but little time fully to exercise its benign influence without let or hindrance. The spirit of revolt reared its head. Millions were torn from the bosom of the Church. Whole nations were alienated. Working everywhere, Protestantism gradually developed, throughout the civilized world, into a revolution which first stripped the Church of her outward splendour, then attacked her temporal power, and now finally labours by moral and physical force, with every omen of success, to destroy her utterly. The struggle now is to discredit Revelation, and blot out Christianity from the face of the earth. Matter and material science are steadily gaining empire over the minds of civilized man, whilst his uncivilized brother still worships fetish in Africa, or follows Mahomet, Buddha, or Confucius in Asia, or invents new devil-worship in Japan. A reviving Paganism in various forms threatens to carry Europe and America back to an ungodliness as complete as that which reigns in other quarters of the globe. For the essence of Paganism is naturalism, or the absolute separation .

of man from God. It is a declaration of independence, an ignoring of God even when it does not venture to deny Him. And who does not recognize the presence of this spirit working potently in the modern civilized world? The tendency surely of the day is to separate literature and the arts from Christian ideas; to eliminate Providential interferences from history; to divorce moral and natural probity from the precepts of the Gospel; to emancipate the State from the Church; to deliver political, social, and economic science from even the negative criterion of Revelation; to vindicate the independence of philosophy from theology, of reason from faith, of this life from the next, of earth from Heaven, of man from God. Everywhere, as the result of this tendency, we see disorder, oppression, subversion, anarchy. The senses and the passions which the senses feed rule the individual; physical force tyrannizes over moral in society. The empire of sin by a world-wide apostolate threatens to usurp universal dominion. *Mundus totus in maligno positus est.**

Such is the surface of history. Blessing to the right, cursing to the left; the blessing a drop, the malediction an ocean.

Yet God and the goodness of God are never without their triumphs. It is not so certain that in the world's history evil prevails over goodness, even in quantity. Evil is noisy; goodness is quiet. Evil affects the imagination; goodness is often to be detected only by the patient use of the intellect. Evil brings death, but goodness life. Here, to use

* 1 St. John v. 18.

the argument of Father Lacordaire,* are two great arteries, the pulses of which we may question in order to find out the moral condition of mankind. Death befalls the individual or the nation, but goodness is greater than evil, for mankind lives on and out of corruption draws an element of strength. Storms and havoc clear the moral atmosphere and secure the supremacy of goodness. Feel again those two other pulses—suffering and enjoyment. Suffering predominates. Labour is more general than leisure; poverty than riches; pain than pleasure. Now suffering, labour, pain, are in the main favourable to the development of moral goodness. They purify; they avert danger; they lessen the means of sinning; they keep the soul before God in a state conformable to the expiation which is the source of eternal salvation. But leisure, wealth, enjoyment, enervate and emasculate the soul. Languor comes on and generates the discontent of sated appetite. Discontent in turn becomes the parent of a whole brood of disorders. Idleness leads to dissoluteness, and dissoluteness to ruin. Comparing then life and death, pleasure and pain, it does seem probable that moral goodness exceeds moral evil, even in mass and quantity.

But let these calculations be false. Let the crimes of men, individually or collectively, outnumber, if you will, their good acts. Let the inward struggles, the efforts after self-recovery, which occur even in the lives of the most abandoned, be reckoned at a minimum. Let corruption and decay be—which they are not—the normal state of the nations of

* Lacordaire, *Conf.*, 71.

the world. There is an answer still. It is not enough to count facts. Mere numerical majorities are fallacious. They leave the metaphysical and moral value of the several facts out of the account. And it is precisely under both these aspects that goodness predominates over evil incontestably. Evil is but a negation, a deformity offensive indeed, but never such as to destroy the substantial goodness of any creature of God. Be the soul ever so misshapen by vice, God still loves and works at it. Like a mutilated statue dug from the grave where centuries have buried it, there still breathes in the defaced soul some remnant of life which the Supreme Artist can restore to its original beauty, and raise to the dignity of a living stone of the heavenly Jerusalem, destined perhaps to some conspicuous place where it will astonish, though not discourage, innocence. Many a man is now despaired of by himself, but not by God. And in the struggle of life, if we could see with Angels' eyes, we should discover evil promoting goodness, and goodness expiating crime. Ten just men would have been enough to save a reprobate city. One good act may cancel and outweigh a multitude of faults. Above all, supernatural goodness belongs to the divine order, and is infinitely superior, if to natural goodness, so much the more to every form of evil. Every little action of the justified man, when inspired by God and directed by supernatural intention, merits by its union with the acts of God Incarnate an infinite reward. Why then should it not counterbalance a multitude of crimes? The arm of David, the

stripling, strengthened by God, can slay the giant Philistine. One day of heroic charity spent by an unknown nun may, in the scale of God's mercy, weigh more than the sins of a whole city do in the scale of His justice. Yes, brethren, is it not so? Sodom proves it. How much more the grand, central fact of history, that the whole world is saved by one sole Sacrifice!

Think not then, ye proud hosts of evil, think not, in spite of your numbers, that you shall prevail. God is stronger for good than Satan for evil. The two-thirds of the heavenly host who remained faithful are more than a match for the third part who rebelled and fell. One Saint is a triumph of divine grace more effectual than the defeats it suffers from a multitude of sinners.

These reflections will prepare your minds for a better estimate of one of the greatest triumphs ever gained by good over evil—that three-fold triumph, the Immaculate Conception of the ever Blessed Virgin Mary.

It was a triumph of God; a triumph of our human nature; a triumph of Mary, first in that long series of her triumphs which have justly won for her the title of our Lady of Victories.

I. *God triumphed.* At the moment no one noticed or registered for history the fact of the Immaculate Conception. Men were busy recording for posterity the doings of the Cæsars—wars, conquests, political changes, discoveries, commerce, empire. Yet, think what that fact was. Behind and beneath the outside show of events, a world-

wide war had for thousands of years being going on, and to all appearance, going one way. The great head of the human race summed up in himself, and represented all human nature. When by his own wilful act of abused freedom he fell from the heaven of original justice and supernatural holiness, from a state most godlike, into a condition of mere natural nakedness, with the stain of guilt and forfeiture on his soul, all men were included in that fearful fall and degradation. They lost indeed nothing to which mere nature had any inherent right, or for which it had any natural fitness, or which was in any sense due to it, or possible for it by its own or any external, natural force. But, whereas, it had, by a free act of divine goodness, been destined for the supernatural order, it lay now in the infinitely lower order of nature; with a supernatural destiny, but without supernatural means of attaining it. The animal appetites, once completely under the control of reason, obtained by the removal of the supernatural curb of grace a fatal liberty of action against the higher powers of the spiritual nature. The stigma of an outcast was branded upon man. And as the powers of evil were let loose, it was no wonder that on the one hand man should readily succumb to their attacks, and that on the other, the malignant legions of hell should derive ever greater and greater boldness from success. Thus the whole race lay plunged in an inextricable morass, overwhelmed by a deluge of iniquity.

Now in the ordinary course of things, Mary, the

future Mother of God, would have inherited this miserable and degraded condition. But the sovereign love of God designed Redemption on a scale of liberality so munificent that, where sin abounded, grace was yet more to abound. The decree went forth against the baffled and astonished hosts of hell—thus far shall ye go and no further. This child of My predilection no stain of sin, no breath of evil shall approach. Soul and body, from the first instant, she shall be wholly Mine, spotless, pure, and undefiled. She shall be wholly fair. Beauty, nobility, integrity—in a word, absolute immunity from the general lot—shall, by reason of the sublime destiny I have in store for her, be hers at once. Here grace shall reign and divine love wholly triumph. Here none shall dispute My sway. No rebel passion shall stir, no evil tendency arise even in its earliest and most indefinable germ. Such the decree ; such the fact.

Ah, then, God's triumph was complete and absolute ! By that one fact, we see and know that God is Master ; that He can arrest evil, though its torrent swell never so proudly, by the simple fiat of His will. The discomfited demons fled howling. Their pride and cruelty fell crushed beneath the feet of Mary. *Laudate Dominum Deum nostrum . . . in me ancilla sua adimplevit misericordiam suam . . . et interfecit in manu sua hostem populi sui.* How petty and paltry beside this victory seem all the achievements of human prowess ! Yet to this conquest went nothing but the calm, irresistible fiat of supernal love.

The thought, then, of the Immaculate Conception raises our ideas of the power of our good God over all that can attempt to resist His might. Here was every exuberance of infernal malice quelled and crushed in an instant. Blessed be God, our Saviour, for this first signal triumph of His redeeming love !

II. Blessed yet again—because *this nature of ours shared in the triumph of God*. Behold in Mary, and in her alone of all merely human creatures, unfallen nature. See what, but for her Immaculate Conception, no eye of man or angel would ever, through all eternity, have seen, the original design of God carried out in its full perfection. Others may be cleansed, restored, rehabilitated by the remedial grace of God, but she begins where they end. She comes forth from the Creator's hands sinless, and never to be touched by the slightest or most venial taint of sin.

Think of this, my brethren. What is the aim of all holy souls, even when they have reached the heights of heroic sanctity, but to purge themselves more and more from all that savours of or leads to sin, or that clings as a defilement after the forgiveness of sin? To purge away, I say, all this, that they may cleave to God, their Creator, in the union of perfect love? That is the summit of their desires. From that summit, the sanctity of Mary starts. By reason of her stainless purity, and the perfect order and harmony which reigned throughout her whole being, there was no let or hindrance to the work of grace within her. The grace bestowed upon her was suitable to her future dignity, and from the first, she

had both the power and the will to act up to it with a perfection and intensity which, at each moment, transmuted her ten talents into twenty, and again doubled those, and so on continually at a rate of progress rapid enough to outstrip the arithmetic of Angels. "Wisdom built unto itself a house," and "the foundation thereof is laid upon the summit of the holy mountain."* Mary, the youngest of God's creatures, is, by her Immaculate Conception, raised to a height of holiness more sublime than the finished perfection of all Saints and Angels in Heaven.

To her, then, the whole fallen race of man can look up, and without pride or blasphemy glory itself in her as worthy of all honour, because she is the sole representative of what it was before the Fall. In her our nature triumphs, through the superabounding grace of God, because in her alone it never yielded to the usurpation of Satan, but was ever faithful to grace, and ever held the supremacy of original justice.

III. Yes; Blessed Mary, Immaculate Queen, and *this is thy triumph too*. Thou hast crushed the serpent's head. In the very hour of Satan's victory over our first parents, God held thee forth in His hand above and beyond the reach of sin, and made thee the help of His victim, the glory of Jerusalem, the hope of Israel, the distinguished conqueror beneath whose feet the enemy of mankind is doomed to writhe helplessly and hopelessly in the shame and agony of conscious discomfiture. Rightly, then, O Immaculate, hast thou won the title of our Lady of Victories.

* Prov. ix. 1; Psalm lxxxvi. 1.

My brethren, under that title on this Feast* is Mary's shrine, through a noble act of pious munificence, solemnly established in the midst of you. Happy augury! in which I see the beginning of a vast and glorious conquest to be made amongst the souls with which this teeming city swarms.

It was in the year of our Lord, eighteen hundred and thirty-six, in this very month, that in a parish church in the centre of the great and wicked city of Paris, a poor *Curé* sat weary and mourning over the desolation of his church. It stood very nearly deserted, the confessionals empty, and the altar rails unused. For close by stood busy marts of commerce, and vast theatres in which pleasure ministered to the empire of the flesh, and numerous houses where the chains of moral slavery were riveted upon thousands of victims to sin and to the devil. The Abbé Desgenettes bethought him, not, as we may well believe, without a special inspiration from God, of an expedient. He raised within his church an altar and an image, and consecrated his parish to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, under the title of our Lady of Victories. In connection with this shrine, he also established a Confraternity for the conversion of sinners. That same month it was approved by Archbishop Quélen. In ten days, two hundred and fourteen members were enrolled. The next year the number of communions in his church, which heretofore had not reached nearly to

* Preached in the Church of the Holy Name, Manchester, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1872, at the opening of the Chapel of our Lady of Victories.

a thousand,* was multiplied ten-fold, and in the year eighteen hundred and forty, there were no fewer than twenty thousand communions. The face of his parish, the hearts of his parishioners, were changed. The votaries of pleasure became chaste; the sons of gain, liberal; the children of impiety, a throng of devout worshippers. God triumphed; Mary triumphed; her devout clients triumphed. Soon the Confraternity, raised into an Archconfraternity by Gregory XVI., extended itself throughout the world, and the Day of Judgment only will reveal the tens of thousands, nay, the millions of souls who owe their salvation to this triumph of the Immaculate Mother of God in the Church of our Lady of Victories.

Happy city of Manchester! that our Lady of Victories should have now come and set up her shrine by the side of one of its principal thoroughfares. She will do her work quietly but surely, if only you will gather constantly around her altar and invoke her earnestly for the conversion of souls amongst the hundreds of thousands of your fellow-citizens. Praise ye the Lord our God, who hath not forsaken them that hope in Him, and by Mary, who ever called herself His handmaid, is ready to fulfil His mercy, which He promised to the house of Israel, and to kill the enemy of His people by her hand.

* Seven hundred and twenty was the exact number. And in the year following the erection of the Confraternity, nine thousand five hundred.

SERMON IX.

THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS.

Credo in Sanctam Ecclesiam Catholicam.

I believe in the Holy Catholic Church.

YOU all know, dear brethren, that the Catholic Church is holy, essentially holy, and this under manifold points of view.

She is God's handiwork. He designed and built her, and for no other end than that she might be in all ages the home of supernatural holiness.

Her great invisible Head is Christ, Who loved the Church, and gave Himself up for her that He might make her holy, His mystical body, His spouse, His home, His temple, His kingdom.

She is the temple of the Holy Ghost, Who lives in her, works in her, guides, governs, teaches her, leading her into all holy truth in speculative doctrine, and into all holiness of life by practical doctrine, preserving her from all error both in faith and morals, and pouring forth in and through her the abundance of His holy gifts and graces.

She is holy then, also, in her teaching, in the end which she proposes to herself, which is that of bringing all men to the truth and to holiness of life, teaching them to keep all things whatsoever her holy

Lord and Founder has commanded. She is holy in her ministry, holy in her Sacraments, holy in all the means which she employs to compass her holy object.

But all this would fail to give us an adequate idea of the holiness of the Church, unless we knew also that she is holy in her members; that she is perpetually realizing the designs of her Founder, and producing fruits of sanctity in her children. Nor would it be enough to know that under her training there had been here and there isolated cases of supernatural holiness, a few chosen souls who had risen to heroism in Christian virtue. We must see, beyond a doubt, that the body of the Faithful who compose the Church is actually rich in members who deserve the title of holy persons. We must be able to recognize, and that easily, that the virtues of faith, hope, charity, humility, mildness, meekness, patience, chastity, and such like purely and distinctively Christian, supernatural virtues do actually flourish in the Church as they do nowhere else. Her actual holiness in this respect must be clear and plain to us, not with reference to Apostolic times alone, or in the early ages of persecution, or now and then at special epochs of renewal and fervour, but at all times and in all places where she lives and works, as the permanent and perpetual outcome of her holy faith, as the effectiveness of her holy laws, and the fruit of her holy means of grace. For this is what we mean when we speak of holiness as an essential property of the Church, and a necessary and sufficient mark of her being in reality what she professes to be—the Kingdom of God upon earth.

I do not mean that we ought to expect to find all the children of the Church holy, or to be able to prove that there are none within her bosom but such as are predestinated to eternal glory. This would be to fall either into the heresy of the Novatians and Donatists of old, a heresy renewed in later times by the Waldenses, or later still by the Quietists, or into the pestilential errors of Wickliffe, Hus, and the followers of Calvin.

But I do mean that there ought to be such constant manifestations of holiness among her members as will verify the predictions of the Prophets concerning the fruit of the Church's work, as will answer to the promises of Christ, to the inspired language of His Apostles, and to the very nature and constitution of the Christian economy. The holiness of the Church does not consist in the absence of flagrant abuses and detestable scandals, but in the perpetual and wide-spread presence of supernatural holiness within her pale. One age or place may differ from another in the abundance of spiritual favours, in the splendour of spiritual gifts, in the outpourings of miraculous power. Scandals may be more rife, abuses more flagrant, this or that vice or crime more frequent at one time than at another. But vitality can never be extinct; the manifestations of spiritual life can never utterly fail; the phenomena of holiness can never cease to bear witness to the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Church. There must be a perpetual series of supernatural actions, an unbroken succession of Saints sufficient to mark out the Church and

the Church alone as the abode of the friends of God.

Well, my brethren, the first aspect of Catholic society, hardly, perhaps, brings home to us that what we have a right to expect from the Church is now, and at all times, a veritable fact. The masses of her children, as the Church knows well, are in all countries, through the weakness of their nature, the forces of temptation, the contagion of example, and other causes, "in a state of continual lapse from the centre of sanctity and love, ever falling under God's displeasure, and tending to a state of habitual alienation from Him."* The Church's main work everywhere is that of raising the fallen, year after year, and day after day, out of the mire; and when they sink again, of lifting them again so as to keep them, as best she may, afloat on the surface of that stream which is carrying them on to eternity. This is the history, is it not, of most congregations—verified not only where the Faithful live, the few amongst the many, exposed to the contagious influences which are no less various than deadly and always busily at work in large cities, but even under the most favourable circumstances of comparative seclusion and immunity from the external temptations of the world? There is a great deal of sin, a great deal of neglect, a great deal of weakness. The Sacraments are either not allowed to do their work, or that work when done seems only too speedily to be undone. Some live habitually in mortal sin, not even at Easter renewing in themselves the life of grace;

* Newman, *Anglican Difficulties*, p. 202.

others indeed start afresh once a year, but soon fall back into their old evil ways, and so spend the greater number of their days in estrangement from God; others return to Him at every greater Indulgence, yet scarcely manage to live from one Indulgence to another without grievous sin, and but too often have to accuse themselves of repeated falls. If we are content with a superficial view of the state of things within the Church's pale, we shall be tempted to think that holiness is not a characteristic, or at least not a prominent characteristic of the members of the Church.

But we must search deeper, and we shall find that much of this gloominess of view is the simple result of shallowness and inaccuracy of observation. Evil is noisy, is conspicuous, is patent. Holiness is silent, hidden, quiet, unobtrusive. Upon the worst of men there is an influence of purification continually exerting itself, and from time to time the power of good gains the victory over evil. A good confession, though but the work of a brief hour or so, cleanses the most depraved from all their guilt, and fits a soul long laden with sin and corrupted by habitual vice for immediate contact with the Holy of Holies in Holy Communion. Nay, in a moment, by one thought of the heart, by one true act of contrition perfect in kind, though possibly very imperfect in degree, a soul steeped in crime and weighed down by the enormity and multitude of life-long offences may be reconciled to God, and made clean and fair and lovely, as if it had not sinned.

Besides, there are always many in every congregation who are bright examples of holiness, living

in obedience and peace, and going on towards perfection. And of this number there are always some, up and down the world, who are more than mere consistent Christians, who are rich in gifts and graces, models of holy patience and cheerful conformity to the will of God, or devoted to His active service; rising upon occasion to heroism in the practice of supernatural virtue in arduous circumstances; leading a life of prayer and of sublime union with God. We have records of such in every age, and we have, at least, heard of such in our own time. Many of you, probably, can cite instances that have come within the limits of your own experience. At any rate, I will venture to say that there is no experienced director of souls who has not, from time to time, been privileged to know most intimately many who, though their names may never be known to the world at large, were worthy of the title of venerable saints and servants of God.

Again, no one can reflect upon the devoted lives and manifold works of mercy, spiritual and temporal, of hundreds of thousands of members of devout confraternities amongst the laity, both men and women, without recognizing the constant vitality of supernatural love, and, therefore, of holiness in the members of the Church.

Nor should we leave out of account that grand hierarchy of the Church, every rank of which abounds in bright examples of earnest piety, of self-denying labour, of exalted virtue. Never, perhaps, more remarkably than in our own days did this wonderfully organized army of the living God display a spirit

of obedience, unity, single-minded devotedness such as evidently proves the effectual presence and fruitful workings of the Holy Ghost. From him who sits in the chair of Peter, and presents the most sublime spectacle of dauntless courage, heroic endurance, and unwearied activity in the maintenance of divine truth and the government of the Church to the humblest curate who toils amongst the poor, or the most remote missionary who forsakes home and country to carry the Gospel message amongst the heathen, everywhere we find a zeal truly Apostolic, generosity without coercion, fidelity upon motives the most disinterested. Holiness, surely, is a conspicuous mark of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

And what shall we say of those who, at the call of God, have surrendered themselves wholly to His service in Religious life? How many of both sexes from all ranks are there who, at a time of life when the attractions of the world are most alluring and the passions most lively, have forsaken all to follow Christ, and persevere till death in a career, the first obligation of which is to aim at nothing short of perfection, and the self-denial of which is, to use the words of St. Bernard concerning a penitential life in general, a martyrdom *horrore quidem mitius, sed diuturnitate molestius*. Such a course cheerfully undertaken and constantly pursued can be no mean proof of genuine holiness.

So much we can triumphantly point to as a sufficient mark of the holiness of the Church militant, sufficient, I say, as an argument to those who are without.

But for ourselves, dearest brethren, this Feast, with its glorious vision of "the great multitude which no man could number," is the highest and best confirmation of the truth I have been endeavouring to enforce. Here the Church is in exile; here the good and bad are mixed together; here the holiness of many of her members is inchoate, or insecure, or intermittent, or misunderstood, or simply unrecognized. Here the spouse is not without spot or wrinkle; there are stains that mar, and wrinkles that disfigure the Bride of the Lamb. The blood and dust of battle cling now to the limbs of those who shall finally be more than conquerors through Him that loved them. But we have only to look up at that glorious throng, which no man can number, of all tribes, and peoples, and tongues, of both sexes, and of every age and condition in life, who owe their present and eternal happiness to the Church—to her teaching, her Sacraments, her means of grace—and the encouraging truth bursts upon our sight, and forces itself on our conviction, that at all times and in all places, the Catholic Church has been the laboratory of an amazing amount of sterling holiness. There is not one among that vast multitude who has not passed the dread scrutiny of an all-holy Judge, and who has not been rewarded according to his works. No spurious sanctity can escape detection at the tribunal before which every soul is inevitably arraigned the moment after death. The holiness, therefore, of each and every individual amongst the Blessed is stamped and sealed by the unerring verdict of supreme justice. You see, then,

in them the reality, no less than the extent, of the sanctifying work that is for ever going on in the Church on earth. You see the results of the action of preachers and confessors, of the parochial clergy, and of Religious Communities, of missions and retreats, of fast and feast, of devotions and Indulgences. You see how largely and effectually the Church, by her ten thousand instruments, has gained souls to Christ. Yes, blessed mother, thy toils and crosses, thy pangs and travail, are not in vain. *Nati sunt tibi filii.* Thou hast brought forth many children worthy of thy name and destiny. They have grown strong through thy maternal nurture. Thou hast trained them to be men of war, to be valiant, to fight the good fight, and to be more than conquerors through Christ Who hast loved thee, and given Himself for thee that He might make thee holy, and present thee to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but holy and without blemish.*

And for you, my brethré, what joy, and hope, and encouragement is there in all this! For you are members of the same Church; you have "come to Mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of Angels, and to the spirits of the just made perfect."† You are weak and imperfect yet, but one day you shall, by the same means as they, become perfect. "Give," then, "thanks to God the Father, Who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the Saints in light."‡ Your end is the

* Ephes. v. 25—29. † Heb. xii. 22. ‡ Coloss. i. 12.

same ; your means are the same. The helps given to them are equally accessible to you. No more is demanded of you than of them. Cannot you do what these have done ? You are weak ; and so were they. You have your dark hours ; so had they theirs. You have been wounded ; so were many amongst them. As they are what they are by the grace of God, healing, strengthening, perfecting, crowning, even so by that same grace shall you, if you will—yes, if only you will—be cleansed from your sins, raised from your infirmity, led on from grace to grace, made conquerors and more than conquerors over every enemy, crowned finally with everlasting glory and honour. This is what God intends ; this is what the Church is labouring for ; this is what the whole assembly of the Saints, who have gone before us, is continually asking on your behalf before the throne of Him with Whom “the continual prayer of the just man availeth much.”*

But to these words of encouragement let me add a word also of warning.

You have seen the end the Church proposes to herself, and how that end is brought about. But the air is ringing around us with far different cries. The world speaking with its thousand tongues, through historians, through philosophers, through newspapers, through organs of all sorts, public and private, first lays down, not what are, but what ought according to their notions to be, the aims of the Church, and then finds fault with her for not attaining them. “The world believes in the world’s ends as the greatest of

* St. James v. 16.

goods," and the world's ends are such as these : " order, peace, tranquillity, popular contentment, plenty, prosperity, advance in arts and sciences, literature, refinement, splendour. These are the world's end, its millennium, its elysium, its heaven."* If these are not secured, nothing is secured. And hence it praises, esteems, longs for, admires success in war, success in business, expansion of commerce, progress in amassing wealth, the enlargement of civil liberty, sanitary improvements, the development of mechanical arts, vast engineering enterprises, magnificent buildings, the diffusion of ease, comfort, luxury, the greatest happiness, so it is called, of the greatest number. Political influence, social respectability, national honour, state ascendancy, intellectual culture, the grace of accomplishments, refinement, all that goes by the name of advanced civilization—these be thy gods, O Israel of the modern world. The Church, men say, does not promote or set store by these things ; nay, she stands in the way of them ; she accounts them mere dust and ashes ; she leads her children to make light of them, not to set their hearts upon them, to look coldly upon efforts to promote them, and, if needs be, to fling them aside—they, the grand realities of the present—in order to secure the chimerical glories of an invisible future.

Now we are in some danger of being perplexed by the incessant reiteration of language such as this, unless we recur as incessantly to the principles of our faith. Yet the answer is not far to find.

* Newman, *Anglican Difficulties*, sect. viii.

Without stopping to sift out the calumnies which lie amidst this heap of reproaches, we have but to recollect what is the end which the Church proposes to itself. We believe with the unalterable firmness of divine faith in those invisible things which the world, when it does not scoff at them, at least contrives to forget. We do hold the present—the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them—to be as the small dust in the balance in comparison of the eternal future. Though we are not going to dispute the excellence of many of the items in the long catalogue of temporal blessings, and are ready to admit that they are good in their way and of much value in their own sphere, yet they are not what the Church aims at, they are not what she was established by God to secure. We do not blame the world for not making saints, and the Church is not to be blamed for not devoting herself to material progress.

These things are not religion, says the Church. They are nothing to her in comparison with the salvation of souls. Your pattern man, according to the world, is the brave, manly, independent, self-helpful, generous, ambitious, high-souled, enterprising man, who gets on by dint of his talents, ingenuity, industry. But the Church looks below the surface and beyond the material, the present, the tangible. What, she cries, of all these things, if a man is proud, or sensual, or unjust, or led by the devil, or the prey of secret vice, or scandalous, or blind to his eternal interests? The Church weighs time against eternity, and prefers eternity. She measures all things by a standard which is foolishness to the world—by the

Cross of Christ. She sets the outcast who returns to penance before the polished worldling. She values one act of true humility, one sigh of contrition, one sacrifice for supernatural charity more than all the glories of this passing world.

Man, says the Church, and we cannot too often repeat this truth to ourselves and others, was not created for wealth, or honour, or reputation, or science, or learning, or material progress, or national exaltation ; but to this end, that he may praise, revere, and serve God, our Lord, and that by so doing he may save his soul. What the world can give is to be prized only so far as it may help a soul towards the blessedness of the Saints. As soon as the world's blessings stand in the way of salvation, they are to be despised and discarded. This is the wisdom of the Cross. This is the true life of man. This is the only path to Heaven. Look up at the Saints in glory, see how they won their crown, and you will be proof against the fascination of all the world can offer.

Oh! then, my brethren, let the world have its gods and worship them ; let it have its wisdom, which is foolishness with God ; let it deride and mock at penance, at asceticism, at Religious vows, at practices of humiliation, at pilgrimages, at devotions, at prayer itself. But let us remember that Christ, and His Church after Him, have cursed the world. *Væ mundo!* Let us stand firm, though power, and wealth, and culture be in conspiracy against us. Let us stand firm, though we be persecuted and vilified, and our name cast out as evil for

Christ's sake. Let us keep the faith. Let us be imitators of the Saints as they also were of Christ. Let us fix our eyes on the end of all things, on the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus. Let us never forget those words, so full at once of terror and consolation : "Then shall the just stand with great constancy against those that have afflicted them and taken away their labours. Those seeing it, shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the suddenness of their unexpected salvation, saying within themselves, repenting, and groaning for anguish of spirit : These are they, whom we had sometime in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the Saints."*

* Wisdom v. 1—5.

SERMON X.

THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS.

ST. MATT. v. 7.

Beati misericordes, quoniam misericordiam consequentur.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

TO-DAY Holy Church bids us lift up our eyes to Heaven, and strive to contemplate the innumerable host of glorified Saints who have already reached the heavenly Jerusalem. They are a multitude whom no man can number, and include, not only those heroic servants of God who either gained eternal life by suffering temporal death, or are now rewarded before the Angels of God for having confessed Him before men by a life of signal holiness—in a word, those who are technically and pre-eminently called Saints—but all those who having died in the grace of God, whether they had to pass through the cleansing fires of Purgatory or not, have been admitted into the company of the just made perfect.

Amongst the many cheering thoughts which this wondrous spectacle suggests, I have chosen one for our consideration to-day which has a special value for us, who are ourselves engaged in the battle of life, and are in constant relations of various kinds with fellow-combatants, the final issue of whose life-

struggle is, like our own, still uncertain. It is a thought of encouragement alike and instruction. Of encouragement, because the multitudes of the saved are a monument of God's mercy—*misericordiam consequentur*. Of instruction, because the exercise of mercy is a condition of obtaining mercy—*beati misericordes*. Heaven, the reward of the Blessed, is an effect of divine mercy. Heaven is the blessed destiny of those who show mercy. Open your hearts Godwards to receive mercy; open them towards your fellow-men to practise mercy. Between mercy shown and the mercy you are to receive there subsists an indissoluble connexion. Close the bowels of compassion against your brethren, and you will dry up for yourselves the source of divine mercy. Open your hearts and hands, and the stream of God's mercy shall flow upon you with abundance.

First, then, let us proclaim the mercy of God in bringing His elect into the Kingdom of His glory. Our Lord, in His promise, calls eternal life by this name—mercy. "They shall obtain mercy." The Kingdom of Heaven, the land to be possessed, the land of the living, where all hunger shall be satisfied and all thirst quenched to inebriation by the torrents of God's joys, where all hearts shall be comforted, and the tears wiped away from all eyes, the unutterable and inalienable possession of supreme happiness by the sight and fruition of God; this is the mercy which our glorified brethren have obtained, and their attainment of which is a sure ground of hope for us. And, indeed, it will be clear upon a little reflexion why it should be called so. What have we to hope

for except from the mercy of God? Are we not wretched exiles, children of wrath, natural enemies of God, driven out from the Paradise of delights? The Good Shepherd comes in search of His lost ones. He redeems us from destruction by His Blood. He bears us on His shoulders back to the forfeited fold of our inheritance. What then can we do but chant the praises of His abundant mercy? *Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo.* Yes; not in time only, but also, and much more, in eternity.

But you naturally object to this view of our everlasting reward, that it destroys the notion of merit, and of the recompense which is justly due to merit. Heaven, you say, is rather the distribution of a reward by the hands of justice, than a gratuitous gift of mercy. St. Paul says—*Bonum certamen certavi.* I have fought a good fight, I am crowned, but not till I had gained a glorious victory. I am honoured, but not till I had served. I have entered into my rest, but my repose was earned by faithful labour. I possess that to which I had a strict claim, and which the just Judge could not refuse me. And in this St. Paul may be taken as speaking for the rest as well as for himself. The Saints are rewarded “according to their works.” Nor would it be less hurtful to the militant members of the Church, than injurious to their triumphant brethren, to represent the Blessed as the recipients of an unearned bounty rather than as heroes who have won their glory by their own exertions. Surely this would be to rob holy ambition of its aim, and to break the main-spring of energy, which is hope of achievement.

My brethren, let me at once solve this difficulty and show you how admirably justice and mercy are reconciled in the divine plan. The objection raised states a truth, but not the whole truth. St. Augustine unfolds for us the secret where he says: *Reddet omnino Deus et mala pro malis, quoniam justus est; et bona pro malis quoniam bonus est; et bona pro bonis quoniam et justus est.* The works of God are not at variance. His justice is not the less justice for being mingled with mercy, nor His grace the less grace for being accompanied by justice. On the contrary, the supreme act of justice by which He rewards His elect is the consummation of grace and mercy.

It is true that each faithfully persevering soul can present itself before its Judge and say: *Redde quod promisisti; fecimus quod jussisti.* Fulfil Thy promise, as I have fulfilled Thy commands. But it is the promise of God that has made justice possible between God and man. Apart from His promises, God was under no obligation to us. His covenant introduced the necessary equality. But whence the promise? Whence the covenanted alliance? Justice keeps what mercy gave. And, further, the promise was conditional. I promise, says God, Heaven to you, if you come to Me without stain of sin, if you have been fruitful in good works. But who would be found without sins, if mercy had not remitted them? Whose hands would be full of good works, if grace had not begun, accompanied, and followed every one of them?

You see, then, that justice truly rewards, but it

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finds nothing to reward which is not an effect of mercy. The wedding garment gives a right of admission to the banquet ; but the robe itself is the free gift of grace. None enter Heaven who are not worthy ; none are worthy whom God has not made worthy. The works of the just do follow them ; but they are God's works even more than theirs. As St. Paul says : *Aptet vos in omni bono ut faciatis ejus voluntatem, faciens in vobis quod placeat coram se per Jesum Christum.* By the eternal law of His justice He cannot reject the goodness which He loves, but it is His doing that there is any goodness in man to love. *Aptet vos . . . faciens in vobis.* A place of conspicuous honour is due to the perfection of yonder beautiful statue, but its beauty is due to the skill of the sculptor. The more merit, the greater grace. The more justice, the greater mercy. Thus it is, then, that the four-and-twenty elders enter into a kind of contest with God. He gives them the crown of justice, and they cast their crowns before the feet of the Lamb that was slain for them, saying—“Thanks be to God Who hath given us the victory. O my soul, bless the Lord who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion.” Ah, when we have reached Heaven, we shall recognize the loving mercy which forestalled us, we shall know with what preventing love It chose us, by what hidden graces It touched our hearts, with what tender care It kept us out of the occasions of sin, and averted from us the thousand perils that beset us on our journey thitherwards. Then we shall see that eternal glory is a reward out of all proportion to our works—“above measure

exceedingly an eternal weight of glory." *Supra modum, in sublimitate æternum gloriæ pondus.* The souls of the blessed are astonished to find themselves capable of so much joy and glory. They can but cry, Alleluia. God praises them, and they praise God with wonder. He welcomes each of them with the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." He proclaims their worthiness. And they reply in the words of Isaïas, "All our works Thou hast wrought in us." All we have and are is Thine. Thou crownest in us what we have received from Thine infinite goodness and mercy.

This great truth will be brought out more strikingly, if you consider the varied history of these blessed souls. It does not surprise you so much to see in the heavenly court the noble army of Martyrs, or the glorious ranks of Confessors, who in the desert, or the cloister, or the sanctuary, glorified God by a long life of heroic austerity, or holy contemplation, or tender ministries of charity, or world-wide labours of Apostolic zeal, or meek and patient suffering. In all these cases you can see room for justice. It is only by an effort, that you recall the fact that their merits are the pure result of preventing grace, and that they owe all they are to redeeming mercy. Yet these are but the chosen few amongst the multitudes who throng the courts of Heaven,

Look rather upon that vast multitude of infant children who never knew the trials and temptations of mortal life, but whose robe of innocence, given them whilst yet unconscious, was transformed, whilst they still remained unconscious, into a garment of

everlasting glory. *Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo.* Ah, you do not wonder to hear that cry ordained out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.

Or look, again, at others who, born in the midst of heathen darkness, or in the bosom of an heretical sect, did but hear the word of glad tidings, and the light shone upon them, and for a few brief hours they were happy neophytes, and then death came to give them, or ever they had known a temptation against Faith, or had their constancy in well-doing put to the test, a reward which you would almost say they had not had time to deserve. You expect to hear them exclaim with astonished gratitude—*Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo.*

And the same strain proceeds from the lips of those—whether few or many, who shall say, until the secret mysteries of the divine government and the limits to which the exercise of divine love and mercy stretch, are known?—of those, I say, who were never externally members of the Church on earth, never gathered into the outward unity of the Faith, but who, by the help of grace, lived up to the light that was in them, and either never lost baptismal innocence or, if they lost it, regained the state of grace by acts of contrition, not the less real and effectual because the very name was unknown to them, and only died in material heresy, or partial unbelief, through an ignorance over which they had no control. Or what if there are some who were shut out even from the chances of Baptism, and knew not of this means of grace, yet became partakers of its effects through an implicit desire of its reception? Will not

they sing for ever the mercies of God reaching in their favour beyond all covenant and promise ?

Others again, I see, not a few, who started at a moral disadvantage, exposed to the contamination of bad example, the children of careless or vicious parents, thrown from their earliest years amongst evil companions, schooled in bad ways, ignorant of good, the innocence of childhood no inheritance of theirs as they grew up inured to vice and crime almost before they knew the meaning of their names. So things went on with them from bad to worse, until the world denounced them as incorrigible. Born members of what are called the dangerous classes, they went to swell the ranks of the criminal population. Men looked upon them as simply irreclaimable, and indeed they lay beyond the reach of mere philanthropy, and were far gone past the remedial action of any human invention. But the grace of God found them out. A severe illness, the visit of a Priest, a sermon attended out of curiosity but that left some arrow of the Holy Ghost deep in their hearts, nay, the veriest trifle of an apparently fortuitous accident, became in God's hands the instrument of their conversion, and the marvellous change once wrought, they spent the remainder of their lives in abiding sorrow for the sins of the bitter past, and in humble gratitude for the reclaiming mercy of God. The thought of it surely does not leave them, now that they have entered into the joy of their Lord. They tire not of repeating with ever-increasing jubilation—*Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo.*

Others, again, there are more favoured in the opening of their lives by external surroundings, but waywardness of will, or weakness of purpose, or the levity of youth, or secret pride entangling them in the miseries of a bad confession, or some one unconquered passion, or some sin of surprise which compromised them before others, did the devil's work and brought them under his power. They rose, it may be, and fell again and again at longer or shorter intervals. Their life was as the tottering walk of a drunken man. Yet they kept up in the main some sort of half-hearted struggle after virtue. Some reminiscences of the Eden of innocence lingered in their memories. They did not wholly rejoice in their iniquities. At last the grace of true penance was given them, and they found mercy before the tribunal of God. How, as they look back over the past, must they recognize the compassion of their Heavenly Father for the weakness of His children, and sing the mercies of God for ever!

Lastly, for we cannot now go through the whole catalogue, or frame any exhaustive classification, think of those who are monuments of God's mercy stretched, if we may say so, to the uttermost. After a life of sin they had the extraordinary grace of genuine conversion in the last moments of their earthly career. Like the thief upon the cross, their hearts were touched, pierced, transformed by the Heart of Jesus, who agonized and died for them. Death-bed repentances, though rare enough to check presumption, are yet frequent enough to prove the patience of God's long-suffering mercy, and the un-

reasonableness, as well as the wickedness, of despair. They enable us to realize more fully the meaning of our Lord when He promises eternal life under this form of expression: "They shall obtain mercy"—*Misericordiam consequentur*.

The practical conclusion from this truth needs little explanation from me. But as this supreme exhibition of God's mercy depends upon your mercifulness towards others, it does demand your most attentive consideration and earnest endeavours. "Put ye on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy."* You see the condition laid down. It is not a mere counsel; it is a command. Oh, then, examine yourselves carefully upon a subject of such paramount importance.

What are your judgments of your brethren? How do you regard their faults? Are you of the number who judge before the time? Are you harsh, bitter, censorious? Do you, like the Pharisee and the proud whom God resists, gather up your affrighted garments and turn with unforgiving scorn from the criminal and vicious, hypocritically thanking God that you are not as other men? How do you treat sinners? Where is your patience with the obstinate, your meekness with the froward, your tenderness to the fallen, your hopefulness of the seemingly incorrigible? Do you harbour resentment against those who have offended you or done you an injury? When the poor apply to you for relief, do you refuse to help them on the ground of their misery being the result of their own faults? Are you cold, selfish,

* Coloss. iii. 12.

hard-hearted, exacting? Or have you sympathy for all kinds of suffering and weakness? Do you forget self-interest in the loving service of the miserable for Christ's sake? Each and all of the works of mercy, corporal and spiritual, should be brought under review. Compassion in act is set before you in the example of the good Samaritan; go ye and do likewise. Compassionate words are recorded of our Blessed Lord for your imitation, when He said to the woman taken in adultery—"Neither do I condemn thee." Merciful thoughts are enjoined by the same loving Lord. "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged." Yes, look not to your external conduct alone, but reform the internal dispositions of your hearts towards your brethren, towards all for whom Christ died. For unless in heart and mind you be conformed to the mind of Christ Jesus, you can never fulfil the divine injunction to be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Fashion yourselves upon the divine model, then shall the divine, and therefore infallible, promise be fulfilled in you—"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

SERMON XI.

THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

JUDITH xiii. 20.

Nōn permisit me Dominus ancillam suam coinquinari.

The Lord hath not suffered me His handmaid to be defiled.

IT is of faith that the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instant of her conception, was preserved by a singular privilege bestowed on her by God, free from all stain of original sin. Her blessed soul came from the hands of God, and was united to her virginal body, sinless, holy, clothed with original justice, never for a moment sullied by the faintest breath or taint of sin. And to-day the Church celebrates this stupendous mystery of divine love, this astounding privilege of His Mother and ours.

Doubtless you have often pondered affectionately on the beauty of this jewel of redeeming grace. You have marvelled at the grandeur of the eternal idea formed of her in the mind of God, and the perfection of its realization in Mary, with such dazzling brilliancy does she, fair as the moon at her first rising, reflect the light of uncreated holiness. It is not easy to turn your eyes away from so riveting a contemplation, yet to-day I invite you to another train of

thought, to the consideration of the way in which we have come to be certain of the fact of the Immaculate Conception with the certainty of divine faith. The study will not be without instruction and spiritual profit, for it is always instructive and profitable to watch the action of God upon the mind of His Holy Church.

Has the Church then, in this nineteenth century of her existence, found out this truth for the first time? Is it a novel addition to her Creed? Is it a discovery like the discoveries of science, as of some star hitherto unknown, and newly brought by more powerful instruments within the reach of our intellectual vision? This cannot be the genesis of any dogma of the Faith. One and all the dogmas of the Faith were supernaturally revealed by God in Apostolic times. Revelation is their only parentage, and revelation was complete when the last of the Apostles died. The Church does not create, or invent, or discover new truths as she goes on. What she has and will ever have or believe, has been with her from the beginning. All her dogmas she received from God revealing them by the mouth of Jesus Christ or by His Holy Spirit to the Apostles. Her office is to preserve, hand on, profess, explain, defend, and when need arises, and the moment fore-ordained of God arrives, define them. She changes nothing, docks nothing, adds nothing. She has received a deposit, and she guards it. It would be a sacrilegious robbery to subtract one iota from the treasure committed to her keeping. It would be an accursed profanation to adulterate the Gospel by the smallest

admixture or addition of new matter to the divine teaching. The Church, by her gift of inerrancy, is preserved from both of these contrary crimes. The sterling gold of revealed truth is safe in her custody alike from sweating or alloy. For her Divine Founder is with her, to protect His Word from being either diminished or debased.

This dogma, then, of the Immaculate Conception, was revealed to the Apostles, and by them handed down to their successors, and so through all times remained in the keeping and belief of the Church, or it is not and cannot be a dogma of the Faith.

I do not, however, maintain that the doctrine was in the beginning explicitly and in so many words made known to the Apostles. They may never with their lips have uttered the formula, "Mary was conceived without sin," or "was immaculate in her conception." We are not talking of outward forms of expression, of definite and precise formulæ, but of a truth, under whatsoever formula conveyed. A dogma is not necessarily one exact proposition. The truth conveyed, and the vehicle in which it is conveyed, are distinct things. We cannot indeed know and hold a truth, yet reject the proposition which accurately expresses it, except through a misunderstanding or uncertainty about the meaning of the phrase. But we may, and often do assent and steadfastly adhere to a truth, though we may never have heard or thought of a particular mode or form of speech which represents and defines it. Once defined and proposed by the authority of the Church, the truth is indeed so embodied in and identified with its

definition, that the same anathema smites all who reject the one or the other. But until the nexus is thus completed, either by the action of authority or by sufficient evidence, there is no such identity. A revealed truth, be it a principle, or an idea, or an historical fact, is not necessarily and at all times tied down to an express formal statement. We do not, to take a striking and palpable instance, deny the revelation of Christ's Divinity in the synoptic Gospels, though we nowhere find in them the express statement that Jesus Christ is God. The truth is there, though the terms are not. Even in St. John's Gospel, where the revelation of this fact is surely most explicit, these terms are not to be found. The truth takes another shape in those grand words of his opening chapter, "The Word was God, and the Word was made flesh."

How then was the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception revealed? There are theologians of great name* who maintain that virtual revelation is enough to constitute a truth definable as of faith. They say that a truth may be revealed in another truth, in such a way that it can only be unfolded in explicit form by aid of some logical or metaphysical principles. It may, for instance, be deduced by logical necessity from premises both of which are already of faith, or from premises one of which is of faith and the other metaphysically evident. The process, they say, does but explain and set before us that which was from the first objectively contained under revelation, which

* Vasquez, 1 *Disp.* 5, c. 3; Platel., p. 3, nn. 201—204; Canus, l. vi., c. ult. ad 10, and others.

God therefore knew to be so contained, and willed men to know also as soon as they should perceive the necessary logical nexus of the deduction with its premises. The nexus is not the motive of belief, but the authoritative and infallible testimony of God, Who by explicitly revealing the first proposition virtually revealed what is necessarily, though at first latently, contained under it. But, whatever may be the truth of this opinion of some theologians, the revelation of the Immaculate Conception was not of this kind. For the Immaculate Conception is a historical fact. It does not necessarily follow from any other revealed truth or truths. It was simply and immediately dependent upon the freewill of God. That Mary is the Mother of God is a truth contained in the two revealed truths, that Jesus Christ is God and that Mary is the Mother of Jesus Christ. But until the fact is made known to us that Mary was conceived immaculate, we cannot by any process of necessary reasoning establish it from other known truths. After knowledge of the fact, we may perceive how fitting that fact was, how suitable to her dignity, how becoming her office and place in the divine plan of redemption. But it might have been otherwise. It is not necessarily involved in her Divine Maternity, or in any other truth we know about her or her Divine Son. The decree of the maternity left it free to God to bestow upon Mary this singular privilege or not. No combination of other revealed truths, still less any combination of revealed with naturally evident truth, can set before us with infallible certainty the fact that this privilege

was indeed hers. The dogma then of the Immaculate Conception is not a truth merely virtually revealed.

It remains, then, that the Immaculate Conception was formally but implicitly revealed.* When we are told that Christ is man, we are told by implication that He had a real human body and reasonable soul. The one statement necessarily and directly involves the other, though for some the explanation may be required in order that they may grasp and realize the fulness of the truth. And there are many other truths about our Lord which are in reality identical with these, but which stand in need of clear and definite statement to bring them home to the minds of men. So with this truth. It was made known to the Apostles, but was not so expressly contained in Apostolic teaching and tradition, not so clearly and indubitably insisted upon, not so distinctly and definitely preached to all the Faithful, that it could never be called into controversy without detriment to the faith of the questioner. It was, as it were, latent in the remote rule of faith; it was not always and everywhere applied by the proximate rule of faith. The unity of the Faith was not broken by its denial, for the unity of the Faith is preserved whole and intact as long as there is no dissent from the proximate rule of faith, from the authoritative decisions and definitions of the Church.

At first there was no controversy upon the subject pressing for explicit declaration. The subject had not been as yet so diligently sifted and examined as to present the truth in a form that was ripe and

* Franzelin, *De Traditione*, thesis xxiii., § 4.

ready for definition. Other truths were for the time more prominent, their constant inculcation more urgent, their realization, if I may say so, by the mind of the Church more vivid. But as, one after another, these were settled, and as there came to be leisure and occasion for the closer contemplation of the prerogatives of Mary, there arose more earnest inquisition into the extent and nature of her sanctification. Some saw the Immaculate Conception implied in the language of tradition about her. Others doubted whether its meaning was so full. Some even went so far as to deny that it was implied at all. This was the stage of fluctuation in the history of the doctrine. Its clearness suffered some partial eclipse. It was, to use the language of St. Augustine concerning another doctrine under similar circumstances—*tantis altercationum nebulis involuta**—that the need was felt for some special direction of the Holy Ghost to place the question beyond the reach of doubt. That direction came, first by an extraordinary growth of agreement as to the revelation of the dogma, and then through the solemn judgment of authority. The clouds had passed; the more or less obscure became manifest; the vague became distinct and precise.

Not that at any time the Church had been unfaithful to her trust, or that the tradition of the doctrine ever suffered any break in its unity and continuity. In all its course, the truth was visible to those who had eyes to recognize it. Though not of old asserted in set terms, the language of the

* St. Aug., *De Baptismo*, ii., n. 5.

Fathers was inconsistent with any other hypothesis. Their eulogies of Mary's holiness and spotlessness would be sheer exaggerations, a perpetual hyperbole, if her sanctity and purity had not been revealed to have this character of primitive and original integrity. When Mary is compared, as is the case generally in the writings of all ages, to the soil of Eden before the curse, the image sets before us a garden of delights, from which sin and the devil are by heavenly power absolutely shut out. In other words, she was ever sinless, the devil had no power over her even for a moment. She was conceived without sin. In the language of East and West, everywhere we are met by testimonies the most striking and irrefragable to the same truth, though not worded with the precision and distinctness of the authoritative utterance of Pius IX. in the Bull of Definition.

Before the Holy Father issued that oracle of truth and set all controversy at rest for ever, though the decision was due to the assistance and guidance of the Spirit of Truth, yet, as is always the case in the action of the Church in these matters, and as is the duty of authority, every lawful human means was employed to clear up the controversy. Diligent search was instituted. All ages were questioned. The dust was shaken from old manuscripts. Monuments of all kinds, the most ancient and the most diverse, were deciphered and examined. Libraries were ransacked. Testimonies were sifted and compared. Criticism and linguistic learning employed their nicest tests. History and archæology were laid under contribution. Theologians discussed, weighed,

appraised every testimony, every argument. The Bishops of the whole Church throughout the world expressed their own sentiments, and bore witness to the tradition of their various sees. And with what result? There rose up a mighty edifice of dogmatic erudition, which constitutes a monument as beautiful as it is vast, to the glory of Mary Immaculate. Open your ears and hear; open your eyes and see. The fact of the revelation is borne witness to, and therefore the truth of the doctrine is attested, and its certainty shown to be capable of definition by the voice of authority, by a multiplicity of evidence which no reasonable man can resist. From east and west, from north and south, in every age, and in every variety of language, it is clear that, in spite of local hesitation and occasional doubt, the general voice affirmed what could only be adequately expressed by the explicit declaration that Mary was conceived without sin. Such was the voice of earliest antiquity. *Lex orandi, lex credendi.* Hymns and prayers innumerable paid practical homage to the truth. Images, allusions, arguments, evidently supposed what they did not always state. In every quarter devotions had grown up from time immemorial which gave proof of popular adhesion to the doctrine. Offices were compiled, temples were erected, altars dedicated, medals struck, pictures multiplied, confraternities established, which demonstrated the wide-spread belief, and the effect of that belief upon the piety of the Faithful. The doctrine was contained, implicitly or explicitly, in the sermons of preachers of every age, in controversial treatises,

in theological dissertations, in familiar letters. Pastors and people, monks and ascetics, cities and their magistrates, universities and their chief ornaments, religious orders and their founders, writers in prose and verse, in popular harangues or in erudite treatises, bore witness with loud voice to the same effect. Could universal error have worked its way amongst the Faithful and corrupted the belief of the whole body of the Church, animated as it is by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost? Did not rather the language and conduct of one age throw light upon those of another? Belief justified devotion, and devotion gave growing explicitness to belief. Suppose for a moment that, after all, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception were untrue or unrevealed, and you would be driven into an acknowledgment fatal to the economy of revelation. Devotion which is not the expression and genuine outcome of faith is but a bitter irony, not the less terrible because it is solemn. The universal belief of one age of the Church cannot be at variance with that of another, unless we are to admit the heretical blasphemy that the Church can at any time cease to be the infallible guardian of revealed truth. The heroic virtues, the saintly affections, the fervent devotions, which in myriads of holy souls have ever been the fruit of contemplation of the sinlessness of Mary, are simply inconsistent with the holiness of the Church, if we are to account for them by the strange hypothesis that they are but fantastic illusions, creatures of heated imagination, no more the expression of a true faith than the jumbled rubbish of a dream is of waking

and reasonable consciousness. No, forbid it Heaven, that even if the doctrine had been left in the condition of a pious belief, not ratified, sanctioned, imposed as a Catholic dogma by supreme authority, any of us should have had the rashness, the egregious folly, to refuse credence to or mistake the meaning of such a cloud of witnesses.

But greatly as they confirm our faith, it is not upon the views of theologians or upon our own interpretation of traditional monuments that we rest our certainty. We believe now, because the Holy Spirit has graciously seen fit to guide the unerring voice of authority to an explicit definition of the dogma. There is no shadow now, no room for doubt, but a solemn obligation lies upon every faithful child of the Church to receive the doctrine with the firm adhesion of divine faith. The Immaculate Conception is a Catholic verity, binding under pain of heresy upon every one of us. When we call Mary now a lily that never suffered stain, a flower of Paradise unique in beauty, rescued by singular privilege from the universal taint; when we set our Blessed Lady before us as the object of our love and admiration, fresh, bright, fragrant, beautiful with the highest supernatural beauty from the first moment of her existence, we do so with the certainty of faith. We feel, we know, as we worship, that the honour of Mary's origin is for ever placed beyond assault. We are not merely indulging our devotion; we are eliciting an act of faith, we are enunciating a Catholic truth.

You see then, dear brethren, the meaning and

process of doctrinal development in the Church. Objectively, the truth was always in the primitive deposit of the Christian revelation. God announced the fact once for all to His Church. And the Church ever guarded and preserved what she had received. Her voice was never silent. Her mind was never forgetful. Her tradition was always in substance uniform. Before the rise of controversy, she remained in calm possession of her knowledge. There was no call for instant inculcation. There was no need of sharp and precise definition. Still there was no inconsistency or contradiction in her teaching. At length the doctrine came into prominent conspicuousness. Men used their intellects to discuss, examine, doubt, some even to deny. But the Holy Spirit overruled the course of the controversy. The exact truth became ever more and more apparent, express, distinct. Explicit profession grew. The germ expanded into a tree, the doctrine passed out of all vagueness and generalities into vivid distinctness. And when the time came which was fore-ordained in the counsels of God, the dogma in its most express shape and form was declared, defined, imposed, by the infallible voice of Peter.

Happy we that live in these times, and have witnessed this grand exercise of dogmatic authority in defence of a truth so dear to every devout heart. Is it nothing to us, her children, that the honour of our Mother is thus vindicated from every suspicion? Is it a matter of small moment that our belief is raised to the dignity of a dogma of the Catholic faith? Is there no valuable accession to our

knowledge, no extra stimulus to our devotion, no ground of hope given by so happy an augury?

Reflect for a moment upon the import of the definition, first as an act of authority, and secondly in respect of the truth defined.

As an act of authoritative dogmatic teaching, this definition is of immeasurable value at the present time. For we must not neglect the circumstances which give it special significance. Around us is a Babel of confusion. Those sects which still retain any fragments of revealed truth are torn by parties and discussions. Take the Anglican Establishment as a specimen. It is now an incontrovertible fact that the clergy "of the Church of England may teach any doctrines within limits which only extreme subtlety can distinguish from Roman Catholicism on the one side, from Calvinism on another side, and from Deism on a third. Consequently, when a new incumbent is appointed to a parish, the inhabitants must wait with anxiety to learn what their new religion is to be."* Such is a picture, by no means overdrawn, presented by no unfriendly hands to our astonishment. Those who look to their Church as a guide and teacher, must feel bitterly the mockery of such indecision. They are offered a variety of draughts. They know only one can be wholesome. They appeal to the physicians of their souls to tell them which is the right one, and they are met by the solemn assurance that one only can be good, but that they who are notoriously unable to judge for themselves are at liberty to choose, at the risk of poisoning

* *The Times*, June 10, 1872.

themselves, amongst the variety of tempting liquors offered to their taste. An authority consciously human, and nothing but human, does wisely not to commit itself to decisions which presuppose supernatural direction, but miserably foolish or deceived must those be who rely upon such a teacher. In what grand contrast to their condition is the calm reliance of Catholics upon the voice of authority! And how noble, how divine the unfaltering utterances of the See of Peter!

Again, as a result of the principle of Protestantism and the disintegration to which that principle condemned all Protestant beliefs, thousands in these days have given up all pretence of listening to authority, and follow each the dictates of his own unaided reason. Rationalism and nationalism have asserted themselves far and wide. They are daily gaining a more thorough hold upon the minds of men outside the Church. How fitting that an evil so rife should be met by the bold and public exercise of living authority. The definition of the Immaculate Conception is at once a protest against the prevalence of spiritual rebellion, and, by calling out into active exercise their intellectual obedience, a safeguard to the Faithful against the contagion of unbelief.

Again, the way in which the Vicar of Christ exercised his authority by defining this dogma without the assistance of a Council, in the presence indeed, and with the consent, of a large number of Bishops, yet independently of that consent, is a practical manifestation of the peculiar prerogatives of the Head of the Church which must come home

to all who call those prerogatives in question. And the glad response which instantly went up, as by universal acclaim, from the Bishops and people of every diocese in the Catholic world, receiving the decisions of the Holy See with loyal obedience as final and irreformable, is a signal proof to all mankind of the living unity of the Catholic Church, a witness to the faith of Catholics in Papal infallibility, and a fitting precursor of that definition of the latter which was so soon to follow. The only wonder is that any man should be so blind after the one as to look upon the other as the introduction of a novelty.

Once more, the light thrown by the history of this dogma upon large and important fields of theology, upon the theory of faith, the nature of divine doctrinal tradition, upon the characters of a true development of doctrine, upon the vitality, unity, continuity of the Church, and upon the functions of the Supreme Pastor, are no mean addition to our theological knowledge, no slight confirmation of the spirit of faith.

And if we study the nature of the doctrine defined, we shall see abundant reason for heart-felt gratitude. Modern civilization is based upon naturalism, and naturalism derides the idea of the fall of man. Original sin is a doctrine utterly inconsistent with the fundamental principles of a system which emancipates the flesh, glorifies nature, and proclaims the sovereignty of human reason. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and its declaration as an article of faith are an affirmation of the fall of man and of original sin, as decided and categorical as they are of the fact that one pure

creature was supernaturally exempt from all such taint of corruption. By insisting on the sole exception and its causes, the Church only inculcates the general rule with the greater force. And by thus fixing the minds of her children upon the truth which is most diametrically antagonistic to the fundamental heresy of modern times, she furnishes them with an antidote to its insidious poison, and cuts away from them the errors which lie at the root of the fascinating theories so sedulously maintained by the revived paganism of the age.

And if we consider the practical bearings of the devotion to Mary, here again we cannot but acknowledge the greatness of the benefit conferred upon us by the definition. Devotion to Mary is a defence of purity, an instrument of conversion, a stimulus to Christian love and tenderness, a fruitful source of works of mercy, a short road to the love of Jesus and of His Sacred Heart, a pledge and earnest of final perseverance. And never perhaps has this devotion received so strong an expansive impulse as it has now by the definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. O Mary, this last jewel added to thy crown, this glorious and singular prerogative of sinlessness, is our solace and attraction. We can but run after the odour of thine ointments; we are overcome by the mastery of thy unsullied purity.

Lastly, in this definition, amidst the storms and darkness which gather round us on every side, and which make us tremble for the destinies of mankind, I see the sign of peace and safety, the pledge of

coming triumph for the Church. If the designs of Heaven had been designs of vengeance, why this bright bow set in the cloud? Has the sentence of death gone forth against this earth at the very moment in which it has become the theatre of Mary's most splendid triumph? Surely the Son will not dash to pieces a world that rings more than ever with the praises of His Mother. And Mary, whilst she receives this supreme homage from the Universal Church, this praise on account of the gift she most esteems, redoubles surely her powerful intercession, and pleads for her fallen children with maternal pity. O Mary Immaculate, I hear thee pledge thyself anew to help the suffering Church, to guard us from our enemies, and avert the wrath of God, outraged as He is by the sins and the unbelief of men.

On this Feast, then, my brethren, take fresh courage to fight manfully through life in defence, not merely of this dogma of the faith, but of all the other dogmas which belief in it involves. Arise, bestir yourselves against those principles of rationalism which are our greatest danger in the present day. The Church is assailed now in her visible Head. He whose glory it has been to define the Immaculate Conception of Mary is surrounded on all sides by uncompromising foes. The Holy Father is a prisoner, condemned to see his children in many lands persecuted and beset with dangers, and all because he is the foremost champion of divine authority. It is high time for you and for us all to raise the standard of the Immaculate Conception, and by prayer and by every lawful means to strive to

uphold the right, to be dauntless as he has been, and is dauntless, in the face of an unbelieving world, and to devote ourselves, our energies, our lives, to the cause of the Supreme Pontiff, a cause which our Immaculate Queen takes so nearly and so dearly to heart.

SERMON XII.

THE FEAST OF ST. JOSEPH.

ST. MATT. i. 16.

Joseph virum Mariæ de qua natus est Jesus.

Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus.

DEVOTION to St. Joseph is of comparatively modern growth in the Church. Not until the doctrine concerning our Blessed Lord had been fixed and ascertained; not until out of the treasures of Apostolical tradition the Church had met every heresy that attacked the Person and Natures of Jesus; not until, in securing the honour of the Son, the Mother's place in the scheme of redemption had been infallibly defined; not until the adoration of Jesus and the worship of Mary had been long and firmly established in the sense of the Faithful and the practical system of the Church; did the name of St. Joseph emerge from comparative obscurity. But after fourteen centuries of slumber, the devotion to him sprang up vigorously in the Western Church. Noiselessly, but rapidly, it spread. For awhile sheltered in Religious Communities, elaborated in the studies of theologians, it shortly radiated from

those centres, and found for itself witnesses and heralds in every corner of the earth.

Now how are we to account for this? Had anything new come to light about St. Joseph? Had fresh revelation added to the stock of information concerning him? Not so, my beloved brethren. All we possess now lay from the beginning treasured in the Gospels, until God's time should come for the sense of the Faithful to take it up, to master it, and make it what it now is, a devotion popular, universal, authorized.

This fact in its history throws us back, therefore, on the Gospel narrative, to which those ever must return who want to enter into its true and lawful spirit.

What then do we find there recorded? So little, that we could imagine the Saint, had he been still living, to have been at the elbow of the Evangelists as they wrote, suggesting that they should keep him in the background. By St. Mark he is not so much as once mentioned by name; by St. John twice only, and that incidentally; by St. Luke a few more particulars are recorded. His name in the genealogy; his journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Mary his wife, because he was of the house and lineage of David; his being found by the shepherds in the cave with Mary and the Infant Jesus; his accompaniment, twelve years later, of the sorrowing Mother in her sad search for her missing Child—these are the sole facts transmitted to us by St. Luke. The first two chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel contain all else that we know about him.

His birth, youth, and death are left wholly unnoticed. His descent from David, his trade of a village carpenter, his character as emphatically "a just man," are the exclusive statements about him independent of his connexion with the other two members of what has been called "the earthly Trinity." His union with Mary is the first recorded fact in his history, and when the infancy of Jesus is ended, Joseph disappears altogether from the sacred pages. Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, and Jerusalem, are the only places associated with his name. He finds no place in the account of our Lord's public ministry, Passion, or risen life, so that we have strong negative evidence for the belief of St. Epiphanius, though St. Ambrose and St. Cyprian formed a different conjecture, that he died some time before the baptism of Christ. The scanty notices of tradition do little towards the filling up of this outline, their light being for the most part borrowed from the pages of St. Matthew. No word of St. Joseph's remains to us. And Jesus, Who praised the Baptist's austerity, the faith of the Centurion, the humility of the publican, the gratitude of the leper, the guilelessness of Nathaniel, the generosity of the poor widow, and the penitent love of Magdalene, is absolutely silent on the merits of St. Joseph.

Were we to measure his dignity and holiness by the smallness of the space he fills in the sacred narrative, we should have to rank him below his type and namesake, whose personal history occupies some thirteen chapters of the Book of Genesis. But, my beloved brethren, this would be a very

erroneous method of estimating his worth. It is rather the part he bore in the scheme of redemption, his official post so near to Jesus and Mary, that rendered lengthened detail unnecessary. Whilst the very silence of the Gospel marks some traits of his character, his humility, his love of the hidden life, his faithful adhesion to the company of Jesus and Mary, and whilst the reticence of Jesus may be accounted for by His unwillingness to draw honour to Himself from the virtue of another, our Lord has by a most exquisite artifice of love left to after ages the clearest proofs of Joseph's matchless excellence. Two of them are contained in my text, and they establish his claims to our love and veneration. They are of greater power to enlighten the meditative mind, and kindle the affectionate will, than the most minute account of heroic acts of virtue, or the most detailed career of glorious achievements. The fact that he was the husband of Mary, and in a true and singular sense the father of Jesus, fills our hearts with loving wonder at the sublimity of his office. And from two brief narratives, the one the story of his faith, and love, and supernatural prudence, so mysteriously tried in respect of Mary's innocence; the other, the simple fact of his prompt and blind obedience; we learn enough to illustrate historically his fitness for each of the principal functions which in virtue of that office he was called upon to fulfil.

O dear and glorious Saint, help us now so to study thy two-fold dignity, that we may read deeper and deeper into the volume of thy holiness, for so we believe we may best learn to love and worship

thee, not daring to tear the brightest jewels from thy crown, or put asunder what God has joined, by treating of thee apart from thy Virgin bride or thy Divine foster-Son.

I. It is then, my beloved brethren, of faith that Joseph and Mary were true man and wife, joined together in the bonds of holy wedlock. A true marriage indeed it was, but no less admirable than true, the most perfect type of the mystic unions of the Word and human nature, of Christ and His Church, of the Holy Ghost and devout souls, of glorified souls and God. It was a marriage between virgins, one by vow, the other in perpetual estate, virgins both in body and soul, virgins in thought, word, and deed ; virgins who were to remain virgins for ever. It was a marriage contracted, as alone it could be, by inspiration and authority of God ; a marriage, to enter upon which required, on Mary's part, the most sublime exercise of faith and obedience, for divine revelation was her only guarantee, and the divine command her sole inducement. Upon these grounds she intrusted her purity to Joseph. Nor was her confidence deceived. He entered into her sentiments with devout cheerfulness and approval, and became the guardian of her virginity. Beloved brethren, when royal alliances are made, we often see whole nations thrown into a state of joyous excitement, and celebrating the event with universal holiday. Think you then that in Heaven that day when Mary and Joseph first were joined in holy matrimony, its citizens through all their countless hosts and hierarchic choirs did not fling forth to

every corner of the celestial courts, and' send up surging round the sapphire throne of the Most High strains more jubilant even than those which form their ceaseless song of triumph, and that had it been given to us to hear, we should have caught that not the least joyous burden of their song was the astonished cry of their assembled hosts—"Blessed be Joseph, husband of our Queen?"

The bare fact of his having been chosen to this intimate union with the Mother of God is of itself enough to settle the question of his sanctity. With what care do wise sovereigns choose a husband for any of their daughters, especially if he is to be the father of the heir to the throne. Shall divine wisdom fall short of human? Divine Providence again ordinarily, as Holy Writ informs us, rewards good men with good and god-fearing wives. To what a height must the virtues of Joseph have risen whose reward was to be the possession of her who was the only maiden worthy to become Mother of God! Other recommendations he had none; this patent of nobility, the only one recognized by God, he must have held. How can we doubt then that his boyhood and youth had been a preparation, by the practice of exalted virtue, for this august alliance? That this is no fanciful or ungrounded inference, his conduct immediately after the union most fully proves. The illusions of pleasure, and the angry storms of passion, are the two domestic foes which, whilst they strive to dethrone, test the strength of reason fortified by grace. That man is a hero who is proof alike against the seductions of the one and

the assaults of the other, and who, even in the most trying circumstances, maintains undisturbed the peace of his soul. Joseph, at the outset of his married life, by consenting to Mary's novel and to a Jew terrible resolve, by binding himself to be the chivalrous guardian of her chaste design, showed himself not only detached from the passions alike of love and jealousy, but capable of the most exalted heroism. Scarcely, moreover, had he thus proved to Heaven the sublimity of his virtue, than it was put to the rudest and severest trial. Ignorant of the mystery of the Incarnation, he saw but too clearly its effect. Cruel perplexity! but not less admirable moderation! He formed no hasty judgment, would not even suspect a wrong. He maintained the balance of mercy and justice at its nicest equipoise. Suspending, however, for awhile the execution of this decision, calmly he retired to rest; calmly I say, otherwise his soul could not so perfectly have reflected the light of Heaven vouchsafed to him in his sleep. And oh! what faith was his, unhesitatingly to accept the news of a miracle so stupendous and unexampled! Truly such virtue was superior to every temptation. Surely too the revelation he then received must have stimulated and enhanced, beyond our powers of calculation the devout affection which had endured unaltered throughout his fiery trial. Then first his eyes were opened to read that beautiful living Book, in which, to use the words of St. John Damascene, without hand the Eternal Word was ineffably inscribed. From that moment his life was spent

in the perpetual presence of Jesus and Mary on terms of stupendous intimacy with them both. How manifold then his opportunities of growth in those holy dispositions which already raised him above all other Saints, except their Queen his espoused wife. For years he was the observant witness of her daily life, heard and treasured her every word, interpreted her silence, joined her at her prayers, lived in the fragrance of her example. Think you that he did not receive of her fulness, or that he was not influenced by his nearness to that Immaculate Heart, to the ardours of whose love the charity of the Seraphim themselves was but as a polar winter in comparison of equatorial heat?

Such was the necessary fruit of the undesigned and unconscious influence which holiness always exercises on the well disposed, and which in this could only be an exception by indefinite excess.

But when we reflect on the zeal that burnt in Mary's heart seven-fold more intensely than Apostolic fervour, and remember that its fiery jets were day by day, and hour by hour, poured with all their concentrated force upon him whom she so dearly cherished, can we for an instant imagine that they failed to produce a proportionate effect? Shall Monica convert the intractable heathen Patricius? Shall Priscilla, Martha, Clotilda, Indegunda, employ their zeal so effectually on barbarian husbands, and Mary not succeed in developing in the heart of Joseph, already so earnest in the pursuit of perfection, an amount of holiness which no thought

of ours can compass in its luxuriant growth and incomparable excellence?

But this, my brethren, was little. Who so miserable amongst you as not to have experienced the efficacy of Mary's prayers? Saint or sinner, child or alien, enemy or friend, none are beyond the reach of her all-embracing sympathies. Not a passing word in her honour, not an insignificant act of devotion, not an upward thought or truthful aspiration, but at once engages the warm and powerful advocacy of Mary. And shall the companion of her home, the partner of her life, the husband of her love—shall he who guarded her honour, who saved the life of her Child, who supported her, shared her fortunes, partook of her joys and keenly felt her sorrows; who worked, suffered, lived for her, nay, whose whole existence was devoted to her welfare—shall he, I say, be the only one on all this earth not to profit by her gratitude, not to feel the force of her intercession in unmeasured increase of grace and glory? You who are her devout children and clients, go to the foot of her image, look up in the face, and dare, if you can, to doubt the magnificence of the favours she procured for Joseph—her benefactor, guardian, friend. Joseph—once more let us ponder on the meaning of the title—Joseph the husband of Mary.

II. But St. Joseph had yet a higher prerogative. He had been chosen to be the husband of Mary chiefly that he might pass for the father of Christ, and not pass only, but in effect hold towards Him from His entrance into the world the office of a

father. Our Blessed Lady herself called him by that title, and so also did St. Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Short of contribution from his own substance to the temporal generation of the Eternal Word, he holds in virtue of God's commission the place of father to that Holy One Who was born of his virgin bride. He first of men, after Mary, knew of the Mystery of the Incarnation ; he was present at the birth of the Child ; to him was committed the holy Name which at the Circumcision he officially bestowed upon his foster-Son ; he held over Him the post of guardian, tutor, governor, in fact, was responsible for Him to the Eternal Father, Whose shadow on earth he was.

I should then be wasting words, if after this I were laboriously to prove the greatness of this second dignity conferred on Joseph. Devout souls, look at him bearing the Babe about in his arms ; see him lodge, feed, cherish, educate, govern the God-Man, all through His boyhood and youth, and you cannot but marvel at an honour too great and responsible for any creature not specially endowed by Heaven with supernatural strength to fulfil its obligations. But then you cannot also but see what oceans of grace he must have received from his divine charge. Straight from the Sacred Heart to his at every moment passed new influences of divine love, only to return immediately in acts of devout service more precious than before, which in their turn won indefinitely more and more grand augmentations of sublimest charity, with no limit save the capacities of his created soul. We want the arithmetic of

Angels to help us to approach the sum of his graces. We have gone up to heights where the air is too pure for mortal breath, and the light too dazzling for mortal eyes. Let the Angels even bow in adoring wonder and bless the God of Heaven Who has given to Joseph a better name than they have inherited, for unto which of the Angels said He at any time, "Thou art My Father"?

And how did our Saint acquit himself of his tremendous responsibilities. Visit Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth, and you will see how he combines the authority of a father with the submission of a creature. Watch the minute tenderness of his daily ministries; fondly intimate without irreverence; daringly affectionate without even accidental disrespect. The virtue of rulers is discretion, and the discretion of the Saints, the only true discretion, looks to God only with calm simplicity, acts in all things with perfect ease and grace as a perfect instrument of His will. Strange as at first sight it may seem, this imperial virtue resolves itself after all into absolute obedience. For obedience it is that gives the soul God's wisdom in exchange for human folly, and raises the works of man into God's works wrought by a docile and unresisting instrument.

We have already seen the swift obedience of Joseph to the Angel's word about his blessed spouse. Behold him at the Circumcision. By his direction or ministry the painful rite had to be performed. He knew full well the exemption of the Child from the law, but it was God's will, and his nerves were

braced and his eye blenched not, nor did his hand tremble as the flashing knife shed the first drops of the Precious Blood that was to redeem the world.

Again, to him was intrusted the great secret of the Word made Flesh. His love towards God and man might well have made him burn to divulge it. A word, and he might be the first Apostle of the new dispensation. But the trust lay within his bosom locked up by the invisible seal of his fidelity to God.

How many reasons too were there for hesitation or refusal when he was warned to flee with the young Child to Egypt. But Joseph's obedience knew no reason that could weigh against the command of God. Straightway he arose by night and did as he had heard.

I must leave you to work out for yourselves the remainder of his history—the sojourn in Egypt, the return, the long years at Nazareth, during which day by day he adored and served the growing Jesus, yet still went on mastering his humility to teach and command Him.

But how did it all end? When his hidden task was done, detached even from the sensible enjoyment of living in the company of Jesus and Mary, this most disinterested of Saints breathed out his soul in a last act of love and obedience in the presence of his virgin spouse and his Divine foster-Son.

In life they were knit together, and in death they were not divided.

SERMONS

BY THE

REV. HENRY JAMES COLERIDGE,

Of the Society of Jesus.

SERMON XIII.

FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION. (I.)

MAL. i. ii.

Ab ortu enim solis usque ad occasum, magnum est nomen meum in gentibus, et in omni loco sacrificatur, et offertur nomini meo oblatio munda: quia magnum est nomen meum in gentibus, dicit Dominus exercituum.

For, from the rising of the sun to the going down, My Name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My Name a clean oblation, for My Name is great among the Gentiles, saith the Lord of hosts.

SUCH are the words, my brethren in Jesus Christ, in which the glory and the life of the Catholic Church upon earth are described by the latest of the prophets. The chief glory of the Church is that she offers up in every region of the earth, day after day, an immaculate and most adorable Sacrifice unto God, a sacrifice of which that wonderful thing can be truly said, that it is not unworthy of the infinite majesty of Him to Whom it is offered. God requires as His due from His creatures homage and adoration of infinite value, and this He has given to Him in this Sacrifice in which His own Blessed Son is the oblation. Our offences against Him are innumerable, and, in a measure, of infinite guilt, and yet here there is given to Him full and ample satisfaction. His

mercies and bounties to His creatures are perpetual, boundless, numberless, and yet there is no lack, in this Sacrifice, of perfect and adequate thanksgiving paid to Him for those mercies. Again, our needs are endless; we have infinite boons to crave of His mercy and liberality, and yet the Sacrifice which we offer to Him day after day is all-sufficient to win from Him the relief of all the miseries and necessities of a thousand worlds. And the same adorable Sacrifice is also the life of the Church, not only because it does so win for her all the strength and light that her children need for their daily warfare, all that she requires in her pilgrimage through and work in the world, but because it is also the life-giving Sacrament of which all her children partake, the daily food and bread by which they are sustained, the Flesh and the Blood of the Incarnate God, of which He has said, "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day;" "He abideth in Me and I in him;" "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me;" "The bread that I will give is My Flesh, for the life of the world;" "He that eateth this bread shall live for ever." From the rising of the sun to the going down, Sacrifice and Holy Communion are repeated all over the world, to the glory of God. The bright line of morning light steals all over the earth, from east to west, driving the darkness before it, and as it reaches land after land, from Japan to the extremities of Europe, across the Atlantic, and then again over

the broad expanse of America and the Western Ocean, it wakes up, as it were, the fire of sacrifice on altar after altar, and around every altar are gathered devout worshippers, their souls purified by the holy Sacrament of Penance, and they receive from the hands of the Priest the Bread of Angels, and offer their hearts to God in union with that clean oblation of the Eucharistic Sacrifice of which they have been made partakers. This is the life of the Church and of all her children—as long as this remains no wound can be inflicted on her that cuts her to the heart, and, if Satan and his servants could destroy this, they would destroy the very essence and source of her action in the world. This is the life of the Pontiff on the throne of St. Peter, of the bishops who govern under him, of the missionaries who carry the name of Jesus into new countries, of the active workers in the ministry and the holy recluses of the cloister, of those who carry on that work of charity and mercy among men which Jesus Christ began, it is the source of sanctity of the chosen friends of God as well as of the perseverance and Christian life of the ordinary faithful, the comfort of the afflicted, the hope of the despondent, the strength of the tempted, the joy of the lonely, the guide and light of the young, the staff of support to those whose feet are tottering to the grave.

And let us bless God, my brethren, that we live in days when Communion is of easy access, and we are allowed frequently and constantly to feed ourselves on the heavenly banquet. Even in the last centuries of the Church's history saints and doctors have had

to contend against heretics for that Christian liberty which is our heritage, and in countries like our own, where the Catholic religion was proscribed, not many years have passed since Communion was of necessity a rare privilege, enjoyed never without difficulty, and sometimes even with danger. Others have laboured, and we have entered into their labours. Those who have gone before us, my brethren, how they would envy our freedom and our multitudinous opportunities! How their hearts would rejoice to see one of our churches, and the crowds of poor and rich that throng our altar rails Sunday after Sunday, even day after day! How would those who by their patient endurance under persecution, under proscription and confiscation, at the cost sometimes of their property, sometimes of their lives, always of all social position and the chance of earthly distinction and advancement, kept alive for us the devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to the Holy Mass and Holy Communion, as the fire from the altar of the Temple was hidden away at Jerusalem during the long captivity of Babylon, how would they glorify God, how do they glorify Him in their place of rest and peace in the other world, as we say in the Mass, giving thanks unto Him for His great glory, for the freedom and the frequency with which His holy mysteries are celebrated and with which His children can feed themselves upon Him at the Holy Table! And what can they wish for us more, what can the Sacred Heart of Jesus, from Whose love all their charity is enkindled, wish for us more, than that we should use our blessings diligently, faithfully,

constantly, intelligently, fervently, and so advance to greater and greater heights the glory of God amongst us, and make our souls more and more strong and beautiful in the sight of Him, in proportion as the strength and spiritual beauty of the Spotless Lamb of God on Whom we feed penetrate us more and more, and change us, as it were, into Him ?

Well, my brethren in Jesus Christ, it is in the hope of helping you, to use the words of St. Paul, to "stir up the gift that is in you," that I wish to speak to you during these Sundays concerning the fruits which we are meant by God to receive from our Holy Communions. I know that knowledge is not everything, and that we may know a great deal speculatively about the possible fruits of this or that sacrament without enjoying their possession in our souls. But holy writers have said that one at least of the reasons why at certain times and to certain persons Holy Communion is less fruitful than at others, consists in ignorance of and inattention to the treasures contained in it. When St. Paul speaks of unworthy communicants, in the full and worst sense of the word unworthy, he describes the misery of such people as lying in this, that they do not "discern the body" of the Lord ; they do not understand or realize what it is, and so they do not distinguish it from other food ; and he adds that, for the same cause, many are "weak and infirm," and, as it were, "asleep" among them. Well, my brethren, one way to rouse such people would be for them to have familiar to their minds a large range of holy Christian thoughts about the

goodness and magnificence of God in the Blessed Sacrament, and their minds, thus possessed with truth, would act on their hearts and wills, by the grace of God, and excite them to fervour or compunction and reverence and devotion in the use of so great a gift. And so may we say that the Church would have all her children philosophers and theologians about the Blessed Sacrament, not that they are to discuss subtleties and agitate questions which ought to be reserved to her appointed Doctors, but that they may know and understand the treasures which they possess, and use them more reverently and more profitably because they understand them. It is part of the work of the Holy Ghost in our souls, as St. Paul tells us, that through Him we may know the things that are given us from God.* And when he speaks of knowledge he means active fruitful contemplation, prayerful dwelling upon the benefits of God. And as the Blessed Sacrament is the memorial of all the works of God, and contains in itself the summary and the essence of all His gifts, it is no wonder if it requires study and attention in order, I do not say to master what can be known about it, for that would require the illuminated intellect of the highest angel, but even in some sort of way to form an idea of all the blessings which it contains. But God rewards the faithful contemplative heart which numbers and ponders over His benefits, as He has caused it to be recorded especially of our Blessed Lady, that such a heart and mind was hers. Her burning transcendent love

* 1 Cor. ii. 12.

for God, for Jesus Christ, and notably for our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, was founded on her knowledge and on her devout use of her knowledge ; and so we will pray that she may win for us the same grace in our poor degree to keep all these things, pondering them in our heart, that, as the Psalmist says, in our meditation upon the treasures contained in the Blessed Sacrament fire may blaze forth and our hearts may be consumed with love, and that love may win for us the further grace that our Holy Communion may be rich and full of fruit, and that, as we learn more the gifts given us by God, so we may gain from their use the strength and light and grace which they contain in greater abundance.

Before I speak to you of the actual effects or fruits of Holy Communion in our souls, I must shortly remind you of the sources from which those effects proceed—I mean of the various ways in which the grace and blessing of God are conveyed to us in that adorable Sacrament. What do we do, then, and what do we receive when we communicate ? In the first place, and to take the lowest ground, we do what we do every time that we pray, every time that we make an act of faith or of charity, every time that we give an alms or do a work of mercy or of religion for the sake of God—that is, we do a good work which in itself, even if it were nothing more, would gain us great grace and favour from God. And this all the more, as in the act of Communion we make acts of faith, contrition, hope, love, humility, religion, adoration, and other super-

natural virtues, all of which have their reward and fruit in an increase of grace here and in the meriting of a great increase of eternal glory in heaven. If there were nothing else, still from this alone Holy Communion, even supposing it were made spiritually only, and for some reason or other not sacramentally also, would profit us immensely. But this is only the lowest ground on which we have a right, as it were, to claim from God the wonderful fruits enshrined in it. In the second place, the act of Holy Communion is not an ordinary good work, but is, as St. Paul tells us, in a most special and peculiar manner the commemoration and repetition of the Sacred Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the mere thought and recollection of our Lord's Passion, the mere act of meditating upon it and solemnly recalling it, is full of spiritual blessing. How much more, then, this most sacred and sublime manner of commemorating it, the sacred rite established by Jesus Christ Himself for this very purpose! How must it be fraught with the richest benefits to our souls, awakening in them all the tenderest and holiest emotions, and applying to them with intense power the merits of every thought and word and action of our Lord in that admirable mystery of our redemption! Then, thirdly, when we communicate we receive one of the wonderful sacraments of the New Law, and so, on that ground also, we have claim on a great treasury of gifts. All the sacraments of the Gospel have this in common, that they produce certain effects in our souls, while each has a blessing proper to itself.

All by their own efficacy increase sanctifying grace in the soul, and with sanctifying grace, the supernatural habits of the theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity, those also of the infused virtues of religion, fortitude, prudence, justice, temperance, patience, and the rest, and, to crown these, they increase also in us the seven marvellous gifts of the Holy Ghost, wisdom, understanding, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, piety, and the fear of God. Thus, too, in Holy Communion our venial sins are cancelled, if we have laid aside our affection for them, and even the temporal punishment due to our sins is, at least in part, remitted, because this is one of the sacraments to which Christ has attached that power, if received with fervour and devotion.

Then, in the last place, we have to ask what in this Blessed Sacrament is proper to itself? We must, then, remember that in Holy Communion we receive not only one of the sacraments, but the greatest and chiefest of all, and this, therefore, we must reckon as the fourth great source of the various fruits of Communion on which we have to dwell. And so I need only briefly remind you of what is the peculiar gift which is given to us in Holy Communion, not in Baptism, not in Penance, not in Confirmation, or any other of the seven. The Communion is the *food* of the soul. It nourishes it, strengthens it, and keeps it in life and health, as earthly food produces all these effects in our bodies. It contains in itself, not only grace in general, nor this particular grace of food and sustenance, but the fountain and source of all graces, Jesus Christ,

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God and Man, the Deity itself, the Uncreated and Eternal Life. It brings to us not only all virtues and gifts, but the meritorious and instrumental cause of all, the Sacred Humanity of our Lord, "of Whose fulness we all receive, and grace for grace." It unites our flesh to His, and in a certain measure changes us into Him, taming the rebellion of our passions, rousing us to all good acts, of fervour and devotion, and uniting us to God. This is what we do when we receive Holy Communion worthily, and on these title-deeds, as it were, are founded our claim and right to the abundant cluster of fruits, which being what it is, the act of Holy Communion must produce in our souls, not, indeed, all of them, in degree at least, independently of our own exertion and without proportion to our own devotion and faithfulness, but still, in the main, by virtue of the Divine act which is embodied and perpetuated in the Blessed Sacrament. It is the highest act of religion; it is the reception of one of the seven life-giving sacraments; it is, in particular, the feeding of our souls upon the Body of Jesus Christ; it is the closest union possible to us between our souls and Him, our flesh and His Flesh.

It will not seem strange to you, my brethren, if Holy Communion is all this; if this is but the barest and scantiest statement of the powerful sources of grace laid open to us in this sacred rite; it will not seem strange that so much is said by sacred writers with regard to the fruits which it is meant to produce in our souls. And without at all aiming at a full and exhaustive treatment of this subject, I shall

follow the order and classification which I find set forth in a work attributed by many to the Angel of the Schools himself, the blessed Thomas of Aquinum,* who stands, indeed, at the head of Christian theology on all points, but perhaps most especially on this, which is in a certain sense his own. All that relates to the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist was his study of predilection, and when we recite the office of this holy Mystery, when we address ourselves to God with regard to It at Mass or Benediction, we use the words and thoughts of this glorious saint. He it was to whom our Lord said, concerning this very mystery, "Thou hast written well of Me, Thomas, what reward shall I give thee?" and he answered, "O Lord, Thyself." St. Thomas, then, or a writer

* The plan followed in these sermons as to the arrangement of the fruits of Holy Communion is taken from one of the *Opuscula* attributed to St. Thomas, entitled *De Venerabili Sacramento Altaris*, which will be found in the 17th vol. of the folio edition of his work, printed at Venice in 1595. It is the 58th *Opusculum*, and the "twelve fruits" here treated of will be found in chapters 21—23. In the edition just mentioned the more doubtful *Opuscula* are printed in a smaller type than the rest, and, according to this test, the editors judged this *Opusculum* to be genuine. In the 4to edition of De Rubeis' (Venice, 1754) it is, however, omitted, and the editor gives his reason for the omission in his *Admonitio Prævia* to the office of the feast of Corpus Christi (*Opera S. Thomæ Aquinatis*, t. xix. p. 504). He first of all quotes Barbavara, who says of it, "Copiam quidem atque eruditionem Aquinate non indignam præsefert," but finds some expressions and images which he thinks St. Thomas would not have used. The *Opusculum* is also printed among the works of Albertus Magnus in the shape of sermons. Echard thinks it belongs to Albertus. The reader will understand that when the name of St. Thomas is used in the following pages it is so used for the sake of convenience, and without any intention of settling the question as to the authorship of the *Opusculum*.

of the same school, counts up the fruits of the Blessed Sacrament in our souls as three-fold, according to the three-fold misery left upon us in consequence of the Fall, which he describes thus—first, the bonds and effects of sin, then the defect of grace, and then the wounds of death. Each of these heads he divides into four streams, as it were, and against each he sets a special fruit or effect produced in our souls by Holy Communion. Of these I must speak to you on the three following Sundays. To-day I will only ask of you further that we may all pray, when our Blessed Lord is exposed on the altar for our veneration, that we may, by the intercession of our Lady, the one perfect communicant of the Church and the mother of our Communions, have the grace to understand the treasures of that sacred banquet of which the Church sings, “Jesus Christ,” God and Man, Flesh and Blood, Soul and Body, “is received,” in which the “memory of His Sacred Passion is recounted,” all its example of virtue and patience, all its words and works of love, all its sad but healing mysteries are gone through, all its merits summed up, in which again “the mind is filled with grace,” all virtues and gifts and holy habits strengthened and perfected, and in which, last of all, “the pledge of future glory is given” to us, the earnest and seed and foretaste and secure promise of that everlasting banquet when we shall indeed enjoy the food of angels, in which no longer under the veils of Eucharistical accidents we shall feed upon Him, but shall enjoy the perfect fruition of His Godhead for ever and ever.

SERMON XIV.

FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION. (II.)

ST. JOHN xvi. 26, 27

In illo die in nomine meo petetis, et non dico vobis quia ego rogabo Patrem de vobis : ipse enim Pater amat vos, quia vos me amastis, et credidistis quia ego a Deo exivi.

In that day you shall ask in My name, and I say not to you that I will ask the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.

THESE words, as you know, my brethren in Jesus Christ, form a part of that long and most consoling conversation which our Lord held with His Apostles on the eve of His Passion, after He had fed them for the first time with the adorable Sacrament of His own precious Body and Blood. He is speaking to them of the future condition in which they will find themselves after the storm of the Passion is over, after He has founded His Church and gone up to sit at the right hand of His Father, and sent down the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, to abide with them for ever. And as we have seen that, what we may call the heart and essence of the life of the Church, and of Christians in the Church, is their Eucharistic union with our Lord in Holy Communion, so we may venture to say that there is not

one among all the wonderful and tender promises which our Lord made to His Apostles on that night before He was betrayed which has not its fulfilment in those who communicate, in all who communicate rightly in some measure, and in a greater and ever greater measure in all in proportion as they communicate with greater reverence, purity, and fervour. And so I apply the words of the text to the subject on which we are engaged, the fruits of Holy Communion, and I say, as in our Lord's name, "in that hour you shall ask in My name," you shall have the spirit of filial confidence and prayer, and you shall ask boldly, and largely, and perseveringly in My Name, which shall have all power to move in your favour the heart of My Father; and "I say not to you that I will ask the Father for you," it is not enough for Me to tell you that then as ever I at the right hand of My Father will plead for you, and show for you to Him My glorious Wounds and the Sacred Humanity in which I am your brother, because there will be a new and most tender tie between you yourselves and My Father Himself. "He Himself loveth you," and then He will love you more than ever, "because you have loved Me," and because you will then have been consummating, as it were, the union in which our love consists, by receiving Me in Holy Communion, "and because you have believed that I came out from God." For Holy Communion is the sacrament and mystery of faith in a special sense, and also it is in a special sense the extreme mark of our love for our Lord. When He estab-

lished it, St. John said of Him that He loved us *unto the end*, as far as love could go, and when we receive Him duly we perform on our part the most tender, intimate, affectionate action of love that we are capable of performing. And so, because you have so loved Me in Holy Communion, there is something to give you confidence in My Father even beyond My intercession, "for the Father loveth you because you have loved Me."

My brethren, we shall find these thoughts help us in the consideration of the subject on which we are engaged, that is, the fruits which God would have us draw from our Holy Communions. We are specially to consider that blessed gift of our Lord's precious Body and Blood in the light of a most wonderful and heavenly medicine for all the evils of our souls in this our mortal condition. We must begin, therefore, by sounding the depths of our own miseries—those miseries and weaknesses and failings and wounds of which it would be so strange that we should be as ignorant as we are, if it were not one of the very worst of our wounds that we do not know ourselves, that we think ourselves strong and whole, and sound and healthy, and independent and able to stand alone, and in need of no support, at the very time that we are so feeble and blind and helpless as we are. Now, as I said last Sunday, the great Doctor of the Blessed Sacrament, the Angelical St. Thomas, tells us that there are three great classes of our miseries, which are to be healed by the fruits of the Tree of Life, which is the Blessed Sacrament, and that the

first of these three heads may be called *vincula culpæ*—"the bonds of sin." And under the first head he classes four wounds, which he thus defines: (1) The temptation of the devil. (2) The repugnance and resistance of the concupiscence which is in us to the law of God. (3) The stain which is in our hearts. (4) The offence which has been given to God our Creator. Each one of these is specially mentioned in Sacred Scripture, as when St. Peter* bids us watch against our adversary the devil, who goeth about seeking whom he may devour; or when St. Paul† speaks of the law which he finds in his members, which fights against the law of his mind, or when the Wise Man‡ asks, who can say my heart is clean, I am pure from sin? or when he denies that there is on earth a just man who doeth good and sinneth not;§ or, lastly, when we are warned not to forget that we have offended and provoked God our Lord, and are told not to be too easy about sin the guilt of which has been forgiven.||

Now observe, my dear brethren, in the first place as to these wounds and bonds of which St. Thomas speaks, they do not belong to the state of sin in its fullest extent, they do not signify the entire victory of the devil, nor the rebellion of the fleshly appetite carried so far as to conquer the law of reason and of conscience, they do not imply the heart thoroughly stained with sin so as to be loathsome in the sight of God, they are not the offence against God which involves the extinction of His grace in the soul.

* 1 St. Peter v. 6. † Rom. vii. 23. ‡ Prov. xx. 9. § Eccles. vii. 21.
|| Deut. ix. 7; Ecclus. v. 5.

No, these are wounds, and dangers, and tendencies, and even, if we must use so strong a word, diseases which infect all the servants of God in their conflict in this world, save only that in the case of our Blessed Lady, born without original sin, and privileged above all saints, and in the case of any one, if such there be, whom God may confirm in grace and sanctify in some special way, these miseries may have been altogether wanting, or to some wonderful extent removed. But when St. Peter warns us against the assaults of the devil, he is speaking to his own dear children in the faith, against whom he has no reproach to make, that they have fallen away. When St. Paul describes the internal conflict between reason and concupiscence he is speaking either of himself, or, at least, of the Christian in the grace of God, and so again with regard to those other texts of Scripture quoted to you ; they apply not to the absolutely wicked, but to those who are trying, with whatever shortcomings, to serve God and to keep His holy law. These then are wounds which can be healed and alleviated by those means of grace which are received by persons who are already in the state of grace, and therefore above all by Holy Communion.

Holy Communion, as you know, is one of those sacraments which are not instituted for the purpose of bringing sinners in whose soul the life of grace is altogether wanting into the state of grace again. It supposes those who receive it to be free from conscious mortal sin. But yet, as you see, there are these wounds of the soul to relieve, and among

the blessed fruits of Holy Communion some are ordered by Almighty God for the express purpose of relieving them. And surely, my brethren, our devout and intelligent use of Holy Communion may well begin from a more practical conviction than we sometimes have as to the necessities and miseries of our present condition.

Let us then, my brethren, proceed to dwell for a moment upon each one of these wounds, as St. Thomas calls them, as they exist in ourselves, though we trust that we live habitually in the grace and in the service of God, though we pray, and meditate, and practise examination of conscience and confession, and approach from time to time the holy and life-giving feast of Holy Communion. These special wounds which we are to consider to-day are the results of sin, they are effects, or diseases, or infirmities left upon our soul by sin, either original or actual, and they are bonds and fetters on it, confining it in its free flight to heaven, tying it down to earth, and impairing the liberty which belongs to the sons of God of serving Him joyfully and generously. It is one of the first secrets of spirituality to recognize the existence of these shackles on our souls; it is a secret the knowledge of which is necessary to found us in perfect humility, and so in perfect distrust of ourselves and confidence in God. It is a secret therefore which must give us strength and hope—so far from engendering fear, timidity, pusillanimity, far from damping our hopes of progress and of final victory, far from marring in any degree the force,

vigour, resolution, and courage with which we serve God. And it is a secret of this kind, both in itself and because it leads us to the further practical knowledge of the immense resources of strength and light and power which God has placed at our disposal in the blessed sacraments of the Church. So let us fearlessly acknowledge and examine into our own miseries, and then see how God has provided for them, and as holy David says, "Let the mercies of the Lord give glory to Him, and His wonderful works unto the children of men." *

What then are these four wounds which have their origin either in the sin which we inherit from our first parents, or in that large overgrowth of evil which has been shooting up like a rank tropical thicket over the fair field of our souls ever since we have had the use of our reason and our liberty, in consequence of our own numberless sins, offences, and negligences? St. Thomas puts them in a certain order, and we shall find in examining our own lives that each one of these is no imagination of a scholastic theologian, but a reality of human and Christian life, which if men do not know, it is because they do not know their own hearts and their own condition. First, there is the external enemy, of whom St. Peter speaks, as I said, "Be sober and watch, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour." And you know, my brethren, how the saints tell us that he spies out every side of your soul, as the general of a besieging army spies out the weak points of a

* Psalm cvi. 15.

beleaguered city, and how watchful and skilful he is to present to us just the temptation or the illusion which will suit us the best, and lead us astray without startling and warning us. And if any one thinks that the devil has given over his work in regard to his own particular soul, that person may be very much in danger of being deluded and lulled to sleep in a false security. Satan must not show himself, and so he does not present open suggestions to bad sins: but he besets us in our daily life, in our occupations, in the society in which we move, in our friendships, in our houses, in our devotions, in our spiritual life, he is present when we are talking over the news with our friends, he comes with us into the Church, he is by our side while we are meditating, he goes along with us on our works of mercy and charity, he looks over our shoulder as we read our spiritual book—not to suggest open sin, but to raise imaginations which may lead us away, to build up the cloud castles on which our self-complacency likes to gaze, to mix up thoughts of personal pique, or of harsh judgment, or of jealousy of other persons, or of self-will and independence, and the love of domineering and having our own way even in things that are done for God. And, my brethren, Satan knows well enough the old maxim, that in war nothing is so small as to be safely despised. No little gain, however little, is unimportant to him. He knows, indeed, that in his trade, as in others, little gains usually lead on to larger gains, but even without that his malice is so intense against the children of God, and his knowledge of the value of

each good work here and hereafter is so keen and intimate, that he thinks it well worth his while if he can but ruin one good work, spoil the purity of a good intention, turn away the heart for a few moments from communion with our Lord to dwell on earthly affection and interests. His strength is in our sins, first the weakness and infirmity of a fallen nature, then our own actual faults, which, in many cases, forgiven though they be, have handed us over for many years, perhaps for the rest of our lives, to be exposed to suggestions, and imaginative memories, and allurements from him which have a terrible power because of the past. But then this is not all the truth: there is One Whom Satan fears; One Who has bound the strong-armed man, taken away his armour and made a spoil of all his possessions, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. You know, my brethren, how as the true faith spread in the world, and as Christian altars were raised, first here and then there, the old heathen kingdom of Satan crumbled to dust. You may know how now in Christian countries, which are not Catholic, Satan retains very much of that extraordinary power even over the bodies of men of which we read in the Gospel history. The presence of Jesus Christ in His Church drives him away: and if this is true in the general, it is also true of the presence of our Lord in the Christian's heart, so that in the old heathen days it was the commonest thing for every Christian to cast out devils by the Name of our Lord or the Sign of the Cross. Well, my brethren, there is still the same sort of power about the

sacramental presence of our Lord in Holy Communion. Holy Communion rehearses and repeats the Sacrifice of the Passion, in which the prince of the world was beaten down and overcome by our Lord: and therefore it is the doctrine of the saints that, as often as we repeat this commemoration of the Passion in Holy Communion, as often as we feed ourselves on the banquet of our Lord's Flesh and Blood, we make ourselves the terror of the devils, we are, as a saint terms it, as lions breathing fire upon them from which they turn and flee, and as we repeat day after day, or week after week, the same blessed Communion with our Lord, we gradually free ourselves more and more from Satan's temptations, and, as far as it pleases God that we should not be altogether delivered from them, we gain power and a sort of authority against the tempter before which, though he may assail us, he speedily turns to flight.

I say the same, my brethren, with regard to the second wound or bond of which St. Thomas speaks, the repugnance of the seed or root of concupiscence within us to the law of reason and of God. Here again, my brethren, woe to us if we think that we have conquered our passions! We may at the very time be in the arms of a refined sensuality which has nothing about it to shock the eye, and yet ties us down as a veritable chain from soaring up to our Lord. We must pass on rapidly, so I must not stop to describe in detail, and perhaps it is the less needed, as this one at least among the wounds which remain on our souls is less likely to be altogether

ignored by us. Only, my brethren, let us insist upon this, that the cure for concupiscence, whether in its grosser or in its more subtle and refined manifestations, is the Communion of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is impossible for us to be brought so frequently and so closely into union with the infinite and immaculate purity of our Lord, His Heart and Soul and Body as it were applied to ours, without the disorder that is in us in consequence of sin being set right and corrected. Holy Communion brings our Lord to us, and the effect is that the lower part of our nature is cooled, as the heated air of summer is cooled and cleansed by a gentle shower, and the effect follows, I am bold to say, in all who communicate fervently, and in all who communicate frequently, though most of all in those who communicate, whether frequently or not, most fervently and devoutly. And then we may pass on to the third wound or the third fetter, which St. Thomas calls the stain of the heart. Here again let us remember that we are not speaking of mortal sin unconfessed and unabsolved. But sin, confessed and absolved, leaves weakness behind it, it leaves inclinations and natural dispositions which have been bent downwards as it were, it leaves images and memories, it leaves habits, it leaves the heart, if I may use the comparison, like a garden out of which poisonous weeds have been rooted up, but which is still defaced by briars and brambles, in which fences, and beds, and walks are all disordered and in ruin, in which the work which is to make it full of beautiful flowers and precious fruits, must

be the work of time. And even after a long period of cultivation, if I may say so, my brethren, if we look into our own hearts, what a number of stains remain—what an amount of perverse intention, or of love of temporal things, what a strength of human respect and of recourse to human consolation, what a swarm of idle thoughts and superfluous cares, what remains of littleness and vanity, and bitterness and impatience, and distrust of God, and of self-will! These are the things in which the stains of the heart consists—not so much actual sins, as the hurtful roots of sin and imperfections without number. And how are we to set our garden gradually in order, and plant in it the glorious fruits of virtue and grace instead? There is the same answer here. I do not say that Holy Communion is the only way, but I dare to say it is the direct and the appointed way, because it gives to us, time after time, an intimate relationship and union with the Sacred Heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Heart of Ineffable Purity. Our Lord comes for nothing more than for this—to transform us into Himself. He has other ways of making us like Him, precept and example, and holy inspiration and movements of the will, but the directly and principal way is by uniting us to Himself. And if we may venture to say that it is impossible for a Christian to communicate well without acquiring in some degree a greater likeness to our Lord in heart and character, much more it is impossible to communicate frequently and devoutly without making progress in our conformity to the image of Jesus Christ.

And now one wound alone of these four remains for us to speak of. It is the last of all and the issue of the other three—the offence of our Creator. This again does not mean that offence of God which consists in a state of mortal sin, in which grace is dead in the soul, and in which we are altogether hateful in the eyes of God. No, it means something that is compatible with the state of grace, something which those who are still God's children, and to a certain extent His faithful children, may find in themselves. In the first place, it includes those stains of the soul of which we have already spoken, tendencies and disorders rather than actual faults. In the second place it is God's view of our perpetual numberless venial faults, from which no one is altogether free, and of which the life of many is almost made up, coldness, tepidity which God is displeased with, and inattention in what relates to His service and our union with Him, any unfaithfulness, neglect of grace, disobedience to inspirations, any laxity as to anything whatever that is deliberately done against His known will. Again, God is displeased with habitual imperfections, of which we are not conscious, on account of the blindness which is the penalty of unexamined consciences and neglected prayers. Again, God often looks on the soul, and in His justice requires penance, satisfaction, a humble contrite life in those whom He has forgiven, and He sees sometimes too great security, an easy forgetfulness of past offences which sometimes has about it a shadow of presumption. These things may remain between us and our God after we have been forgiven

by the Sacrament of Penance, and some of them involve on God's part a distance from us, that He seldom visits us, does not give us great and high aspirations, and deals with us like a Father, indeed, but still a Father, as He says in the Apocalypse, "who has some things against us," and on our part they involve a shrinking from God, a feeling that all is not quite right, the fear that made Adam hide himself in the garden, the hanging back from intercourse with Him lest we should find ourselves reprov'd. My brethren, this is the worst wound of all, for it deprives us of the full happiness of God's children, we cannot be at ease with Him, we do not open our hearts to Him, we are not treated by Him as His dear friends, His secrets are not made known to us, His great designs are not committed to us, He does not ask of us great sacrifices and great sufferings for His Name's sake!

Yes, this is the worst wound of all, but like all others, it has its cure in Holy Communion frequently and devoutly received. Holy Communion has the power of cancelling the debt of punishment we still owe to God; it has the power of doing away with our daily venial sins and raising us up above them; we have seen how it cures the stain of our souls, it can drive out imperfect habits by inspiring acts of virtue, it can remove the distance between us and our Father by the presence in our hearts of the Son of His love. The whole of His Passion is concentrated in it, and if the memorial of His Passion can make the devils flee, if it can calm the heat of our passions, much more can it turn away the wrath of our Creator

by presenting to Him and applied fully to us the remembrance of the adorable Sacrifice of the Cross by which our debt was paid. At times of Holy Communion the Father sees us not only in our quality of His children, His redeemed possession through Jesus Christ, He sees us united to Him, one with Him, His precious Body changing us into Itself, His pure and spotless Heart, His Soul enriched with infinite graces united to us and dwelling in us. The love which He bears to Jesus Christ in His Passion falls upon our souls like a ray of golden light from heaven, it transfigures us and clothes us with His beauty as He sits at the right hand of His Father. The Apostle says there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ, and surely much more is there no condemnation for those in whom Jesus Christ dwells, for of them must be true His own gracious words, that "the Father Himself loveth you, because you have loved Me."

SERMON XV.

FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION. (III.)

ST. JOHN x. 10.

Ego veni ut vitam habeant, et abundantius habeant.

I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.

THESE words of our Blessed Lord, dear brethren in Jesus Christ, express by their very form and emphasis the greatness of the gifts which our Lord declares that He has come to bestow. Just before, He had said, "I am the door, by Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved;" and then, as if this were but little, He added, "And he shall go in, and go out, and shall find pasture." It is not then mere salvation from death and its dangers, that our Lord comes to bestow on us, great as that boon would be: it is a rich abundance of life and health and strength and vigorous happiness. Elsewhere the Evangelist tells us that "of His fulness we have all received, and grace for grace"—grace upon grace, one leading to another, one crowning and perfecting another. When the good Samaritan rescued the poor wayfarer from his miserable condition, he did not merely barely save his life, but he

bound up his wounds, and poured in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him and provided for his further care even after his own departure. This is the image drawn by our Lord Jesus Christ of His own tender care for our souls, and we may take its import as our guide in the considerations in which we are engaged as to the fruits of that principal means of grace which He has left us in the Blessed Sacrament of His own Body and Blood. Last Sunday we saw how we are liable to four great miseries which remain to us as the consequences of former falls, either of our race itself or of ourselves personally and actually, and how our Lord has provided for their healing in this adorable Sacrament. If we had not so mighty a means of restoration and recovery at hand, we might well be dismayed at the thought of these our wounds: but our Lord, as we see, has come to heal them. And now the text tells us that He describes the blessing which He has provided us, not merely as life, but as more abundant life: as something rising far above the simple quelling of enemies and inherent evils, as something which corresponds to the emphatic repetition of His language, a higher state of healthiness and power—life raised as it were to a new level and endowed with new capacities and operations, a life ever increasing in vigour and range and intensity and beauty. “I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.”

The holy writer whose treatise I am following, speaks, as I said last Sunday, of a second class of

miseries to which we are at present liable, over and above those which we have already tried to explain. This second class he describes under the general name of "defects of grace": of want, that is, of the effects of that heavenly aid which God vouchsafes, not as of right, but as a free gift of His bounty, to those of His creatures whom He has made free and intelligent, and so capable of cooperating with His supernatural assistance to the full extent of His wonderful designs and counsels in their regard. And this defect of grace, we are told, is four-fold. In the first place, we lack it as to the knowledge of ourselves: in the second place, as to our love for our neighbour: in the third, as to what this holy writer calls spiritual sweetness and taste: and lastly, as to the perfection and consummation of good in work and action. And before we go any further, let us remark that these four defects differ from those other four wounds of which we spoke last Sunday, in this respect, that they are conditions of our nature in itself as such, and not, in strictness of theory, the consequences of sin. I mean that our human nature, taken in the perfection which belongs to it as such, would be without that fulness of self-knowledge, that fervour of charity, that relish and delight in spiritual things and operations, that power of perseverance and strength of purpose and constancy of exertion which the supernatural grace of God alone can bestow upon it. Lamentable as were the consequences of the fall of our first parents, yet when Adam fell and lost the glorious dowry of preternatural and supernatural powers which had been given to him, still the gifts

then withdrawn from him and from his descendants, were strictly and substantially and essentially beyond and above his nature, which then indeed was left to itself, except as far as it was affected on the one hand for evil, by the forfeiture of those gifts which God intended it to have retained, and the retention of which was necessary for the working out of its higher destiny; or on the other hand, for good, by the free gift of fresh grace for the sake of Jesus Christ which was immediately placed within its reach notwithstanding all the penalties of its fallen condition. As a matter of fact the state of grace came into being with the state of nature, and nature has never been left to itself by Almighty God without copious supplies of His grace. Adam needed grace, and we need grace; there is no difference between us as to the fact; but we need grace far more than he did; he needed grace to avoid evils, to ward off diseases and dangers, to sustain his spiritual life, to practise the lofty exercises and happy obedience of his supernatural condition of probation: we need it for all those things, but also to repair wounds, to heal diseases, to restore life to the soul when it has already been lost. Thus the need of grace is a condition of our nature. God has made us, whether fallen or not, to live upon His grace as the air that we breathe. Air and light and food are necessary for our bodily life, and so is grace to the life of our soul. We are among the noblest of God's creatures, a little lower than the angels, and we share with them the highest privilege which He has bestowed on any that He has made, because we are like Him in the possession of a

spiritual being, and we have the power of choosing for ourselves, and so of serving Him freely and giving to Him the highest kind of homage He can receive, the homage of free love and deliberate voluntary self-devotion.

But though He has made us free, He has not made us self-sufficient and independent. On the contrary, He has made us, though so high in the scale of creation, singularly dependent and helpless in ourselves, both in the natural order, and much more in the supernatural order. Free, intelligent creatures, such as we are, are not to serve Him mechanically, as the sun and moon and stars, as the trees that grow according to law, the flowers that bloom and perish, or the teeming animal creation which honours Him by the instinctive unconscious observance of the law of its being. But the fact of our intelligence and freedom opens us to the operations of His grace. We are not to be forced, but we are to be won and to be aided by our God, we are to be enlightened and helped and raised and ennobled, our faculties enlarged and expanded, our whole nature lifted, strengthened, and deified, a higher life and a more perfect and abiding condition can be earned and won by us by our cooperation with the work of God, Who as it were, having made us free, sets Himself to win our love, dealing with each one personally and intimately Himself, acting continually on our souls, that the glory which we are to give to Him after our probation is over may be the fruit of His own grace, and yet at the same time the reward of our faithfulness. But, my brethren,

this is not the time to follow out further the wonderful subject of God's arrangements with us in the economy of His grace. What is most important for us to-day is this, that we should understand in reference to our present subject, that which is the foundation of all true humility, and so of all earnest reverence to God our helper, of all perfect confidence in Him, that which was the foundation of the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ, of His Blessed Mother, of the angels in heaven, and of the saints, I mean the weakness and limited power of any created nature whatsoever, and of our own in particular, even if we had not the additional weight to drag us down, the additional fetters to impede our actions, which are involved in the fact that our nature is fallen, and that we are actual sinners. I say that this consciousness of the lowness and weakness of any creature was the foundation of the humility of the saints, of their utter self-distrust, of their intense gratitude to God, of their burning devotion of themselves to His service, and especially of their perpetual unintermitting, eager, fervent use of every means of grace that was within their reach, and more especially of this great means of grace of which we are now speaking, the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord. This it is especially in which we are trying to teach ourselves to become their imitators, and we may establish our imitation of them in this respect on the solid ground of reason and conviction by learning from them, in the first instance to think very lowly indeed of our nature in itself, not as bad, for nothing that

came from the hands of God our Creator is bad, not as deformed and diseased in itself, for it has its natural ineffable beauty as resembling God, it has its own goodness and its proper powers, but (as has been said by some holy writers) as retaining in itself, apart from divine grace the characteristics of the nothing out of which it was made, as a rope of sand is always a rope of sand, as a vessel made of a frail weak material is always frail and weak. And so our nature, even at its best, considered by itself, is weak and needy, has a poor stock of knowledge, a limited range of faculties, a very moderate firmness of purpose, not much force, not much consistency, not much endurance, not much tenacity, and no power at all of self-support, no command over itself, so as to promise the future. It may be made to glow with light, and beam with strength, and aspire to lofty achievements and bear the weight of great labours and even suffer great afflictions, and earn mighty rewards by means of the grace of God given unto it through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And indeed it may be for the very reason of its weakness and fragility that it is made the recipient of gifts so noble, by means of which its native nothingness is empowered with spiritual grandeur and eternal strength. The Apostle speaks of the greatest treasures as being intrusted to earthly vessels, that the excellency thereof may be of the power of God.* He hath not "taken hold of angels," he says elsewhere, "but of the seed of Abraham." He taketh hold, He unites Himself, not to the highest, but to

* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

the lowest and feeblest of His spiritual creatures. And so our Blessed Lady sings of the exaltation of our nature by the Incarnation: "He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. He hath filled the hungry with good things." The great outpourings of His beneficence have been for those whose feebleness and poverty called most loudly on His charity and mercy.

Well, my brethren, it is before men of such a mould and nature as this that the Christian course is set by God. In order to follow our Lord along the path of Christian virtue from one end of our life to another, God demands of us great things. The achievement of Christian perfection requires qualities in us which are just the contrary of these four miseries of which we are now speaking, as well as of those others of which we have spoken and are yet to speak.

It is necessary for us to know ourselves, because on that self-knowledge must be built the fabric of our Christian character. We must know what we are by nature, what we are in consequence of our original sin, what we have added to this by our actual transgressions, how low we have sunk if we have ever altogether lost the grace of God and deserved hell, how little of good there is even in our best actions. And yet to our natural shortness and imperfection of sight there has been added, in consequence of the Fall, an extreme darkness over our souls, and this again has been made more dangerous to us by the number of false maxims and untrue principles or conclusions which we have adopted through the self-delusion which has been

engendered and fostered by our manifold past sins. You may have read in the life of a very holy man, Father Balthasar Alvarez, one of the purest and most perfect souls of his day, the guide and confessor of St. Teresa, how his actions, as to which he took so much pains to make them perfect by purity of intention and great diligence in performing them, were once in prayer represented to him under the image of a bunch of grapes, of which very few indeed were free from mildew or decay or some other defect; and how the holy man was humbled at seeing the difference between his own view of what he was doing for God and the truth concerning it.

And if that perfect servant of God was thus taught that even in the best actions of such as himself there was defect and imperfection, what an idea does this give us of the common actions of ordinary Christians, even of their deliberate and conscious acts, not to speak of that immense range of faults which are in the mind of the holy Psalmist when he cries, "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord, and from those of others spare Thy servant."*

And if we do not know ourselves, so also are we ignorant about God, about the world around us, and the snares with which our enemy endeavours to entrap us; left to ourselves we are blind guides, we esteem that which is worthy of contempt, and despise that which is worthy of esteem, we call evil good, and good evil, as the prophet says, we take the means for the end and the end for the means,

* Psalm xviii. 13.

and suppose our happiness to consist in what is really our misery. And thus we come to see our need of light. And where shall we get light, except from our Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the World? In the Gospel of St. John, so full of sacramental teaching, He over and over again declares that He is the Light, that He has come into the world to enlighten it, that as long as He is in the world He is the Light of the World. I suppose that from Him, the fountain of all light, we gain light for our souls in many different ways. Light comes to us from the Word of God, read or heard, light comes to us from the examination of our conscience, light comes to us in a special manner from the careful use of the Sacrament of Penance, or again from a study of His blessed Life, or of the example of the saints.

But I am speaking of Holy Communion in particular, and so I say, that though there are so many other ways in which He may enlighten us, still after all this is in a special manner the sacrament of light, our soul is filled with heavenly knowledge as the sun's rays fill a room into which they stream. There is no part of our intellectual faculties which is not touched and made to glow with heavenly illumination. We have the figure of this property of our Lord in the Old Testament history, when Jonathan the son of Saul dipped his rod into a honeycomb, and carried his hand to his mouth, and, as the Scripture says, "His eyes were lightened;"* or again there is a type of the efficacy of His sacramental presence in that which is recorded of the disciples

* 1 Kings xiv.

who walked with Him to Emmaus, and knew Him at last in the breaking of bread.*

I do not say that great light will come all at once, though mighty changes of the kind have been produced by one Holy Communion, but I say that if we approach Holy Communion frequently and devoutly, here we have the true appointed remedy for our ignorance, and that we shall find our rules of judgment and our maxims of conduct altered and supernaturalized, our powers of spiritual discernment enlarged, our eyes trained to gaze at heavenly things, we shall find ourselves at home with the divine truths of faith and the holy precepts of conduct which come to us from the example and teaching of our Blessed Lord.

So, also, my brethren, as to charity. The Church has set before us to-day,† in the Epistle read at Holy Mass, that heavenly description of charity left to us by St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. And who of us can have listened to it or read it without seeing how far we are from the perfection of this blessed virtue, the fulfilment of this special precept of our Lord—"Charity is patient, is kind, envieth not, doeth nothing perversely, is never puffed up with pride, is never ambitious, does not seek her own," does not love to have her own way or will in good, is not put out when others do what she would fain do, "is not provoked to anger, does not think evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth." How, my brethren, do these golden

* St. Luke xxiv.

† This sermon was preached on Quinquagesima Sunday.

words of St. Paul rebuke our self-seeking, our carelessness as to our neighbour's feelings or interests, our readiness to form harsh judgments, or to grasp at the best or first for ourselves, our jealousies, our narrowness, our personal prejudices, our lingering resentments, our imperfect reconciliations, and our niggardly beneficence, our coldness and want of sympathy when sympathy is all that we have to give! And how are we to gain on ourselves in this respect, how are we to root out more and more the self-love which keeps us back in this matter of charity, except by receiving into our hearts the great treasure of divine love, Jesus Christ our Lord, Who said of His charity that He had come to cast fire on the earth, and what would He but that it be kindled? If He yearns so much to see charity enkindled on the earth, when will He Who is Charity itself, when will He work more powerfully to produce this blessed flame in our hearts than when He comes to them in the sacrament of charity, in that Holy Communion which in every circumstance of its institution, as even in the very elements themselves which have been selected to be its outward veils, conveys the image, and not only the image, but the grace of mutual union in the closest and most intimate manner?

So, also, once more, as to those other two miseries of our nature. However fervent and courageous we may be in our Christian course, we cannot help feeling day after day that this world is a place of exile, a valley of tears, a place of which the dull, heavy, leaden atmosphere so much affects us that

the service of God wearies us, that spiritual things are often tasteless, that we feel monotony and loneliness and desolation, and that it is a perpetual and irksome strain up hill, as it were, or against the stream, to follow on after our Lord with the Cross on our shoulder. It is this even if we are doing our best. But if we have listened to the world and given our hearts to sensible things and enjoyments lower than befit the children of God, then the effect as a punishment is often worse, and it amounts to our feeling a positive repugnance and nausea even at the blessed practice of virtue, even at prayer, even at Communion itself. Such is the weakness of our nature, which is called to rise above itself into a sphere not kindred to it, where it is called to supernatural perfection; and often to the weakness of nature is added the sad power of habits of sin or worldliness. Well, our Lord knew of all this, my brethren, and even spoke of it in a figure when He had the multitude with Him in the wilderness, and said, "If I send them away fasting they will faint by the way, for many of them have come from far:" and then, as you know, He fed them with the five loaves and two fishes, the type of His Sacred Humanity and our food in the Blessed Sacrament.

This is the bread of the strong, which has in itself every kind of sweetness; the bread that strengthens man's heart, the wine that cheers the heart of man. The Church tells us that our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament produces all those effects on our souls which good food produces for our

bodily life. And we know how it is a part of the loving providence of our God that the true food which is so necessary to us should also delight as well as refresh us, should be sweet and palatable as well as sustaining and strengthening. And so in compassion to our misery in this our exile, our God has given us this the daily bread of our souls, and has attached to it the quality of causing spiritual joy and delight, like some most sweet food, partly by the presence of our Lord, partly by the fervour it enkindles in us, partly by its power of subduing what is evil and setting in order what is amiss in us, partly by the calm and peace and enlightenment which it leaves behind it. My brethren, there is nothing about the Blessed Sacrament which seems to show God's tender, delicate, considerate love more than this, and if there are any who will object that they prepare themselves devoutly and do their best to make their Holy Communion well, and yet do not feel this special delight so necessary, at least so useful to us in helping us to serve God well and heartily, I answer them in two ways, following St. Thomas and other holy doctors of the Church. Putting aside, as I am bound to do, the very common case in which we are ourselves in fault, either because we do not prepare by devout and fervent acts of faith and charity to receive our Lord, or because our spiritual palate has become spoilt by great affection to earthly enjoyments, there are two answers, as I said. One is, that the spiritual joy of Communion is often not given at the very time, but comes to us afterwards, when we go forth to

our daily work and want it more, when we often find our hearts bounding with unwonted joy. Another is, that there are two kinds of sweetness, one of which is felt in the heart in sensible devotion, another of which is perceived by the understanding and mind, which feed on the truth of the presence of Christ in the Holy Communion and so are delighted with it. The first is like the sweetness of a delicious fruit to the palate, the second is the preciousness of a very healing medicine, which he who takes it delights in because he knows that it will save his life. And those to whom God does not give the first sweetness may rejoice and delight themselves in the other.

And again, as to the last of our four miseries, our inconstancy, feebleness, fickleness, want of power; here again a few moments meditation are enough to show us how our Lord in the Holy Communion takes our frail and miserable nature and strengthens it, transforms it, makes it firm and powerful and persevering by the communication of Himself. This also is typified in Scripture, both by that action of our Blessed Lord to which I have already referred, and notably by what we are told of Elias, that after he had eaten the food brought him by the angel, he walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto Horeb, the mountain of God.* That food from heaven supported the prophet in his long journey, the type of human life, and so also the true bread from heaven is our support day after day in our Christian course, it enables us to persevere in our undertakings, to accomplish what

* 3 Kings xix. 8.

we have begun for God and go on unto perfection, to fit ourselves at last for the true mountain of God, the presence of Him in heaven.

This then, my brethren in Jesus Christ, is the more abundant life which our Lórd has come to give us, and of which we receive the seed and the principle when we receive Him devoutly in Holy Communion. It is a life, not only delivered from gross sins, not only shielded from the tyranny of the devil, not only undisturbed by any serious and fatal rebellion of concupiscence and passion, not only rescued by the presence of the Immaculate Lamb within us from the displeasure of the Eternal Father, but a life raised high above the ordinary condition even of a blameless morality and a conscience void of offence, a life which consists in the exercise of supernatural powers and the play of heavenly energies, in which the mind is gradually more and more illuminated by a divine light, in which the heart is inflamed by the fire of a divine love, in which the soul goes on its way along the path of perfection, difficult though it be, though there be much to conquer, much to endure, much to sacrifice, rejoicing, as the Psalmist says, as a giant to run his course, and in which the weakness and inconstancy of our created nature are changed into the abiding strength, tenacious purpose, and immoveable constancy which belong to heaven and to eternity. How can it be otherwise, when we have within us the Word made Flesh, the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, endowed with ineffable light and boundless charity, and the full enjoyment

of God and the marvellous might of grace given without any measure, endowed with all these in such a manner, with such a purpose in the divine counsels, that it may be at once the meritorious cause and the instrumental cause of the like graces in us? These powers are in the Sacred Human Nature of Jesus Christ, by virtue of the grace of union with His Divine Person, and they are to be communicated to us in no way so directly and efficaciously as by virtue of our sacramental union with Him. Prayer and precept and obedience and example may give us them in a measure, nothing can give us them so naturally, so immediately, as the presence of our Lord within us. Other means of grace are as rays from the source of light, as streams from the ever-flowing fountain; Jesus Christ is the Sun of the soul, the unfailing Fountain Head itself. His work in the soul is silent and cannot be traced, but it is infallible and inevitable. We cannot measure its progress day by day, but after a time we find a change has taken place.

Such is the law of all interior spiritual action. "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, Behold here, or Behold there, for lo! the Kingdom of God is within you."* The Kingdom of God is the presence of Jesus Christ. It begins as a seed, and it grows into a mighty tree that fills the heavens with its branches. To those who do their part in preparation, in devout reception, in continued and humble thanksgiving for the Divine Gift, in honouring the Guest Whom

* St. Luke xvii. 21,

they have welcomed, in yielding themselves to His guidance, it is not bold to say that His presence must produce its fruit. Human strength is nothing, but the touch of its Creator can make it divine. "The Lord is the everlasting God, Who hath created the ends of the earth. He shall not faint nor labour, neither is there any searching out of His wisdom. It is He that giveth strength to the weary, and increaseth force and might to them that are not. Youths shall faint and labour and young men shall fall by infirmity. But they that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." *

* *Isaias* xl. 28—31.

SERMON XVI.

FRUITS OF HOLY COMMUNION. (IV.)

ST. MATT. iv. 11.

Et ecce angeli accesserunt et ministrabant ei.

And behold angels came and ministered unto Him.

THE Evangelists tell us, my brethren in Jesus Christ, that after Satan had exhausted his cunning and his power in his temptation of our Lord, he departed from Him for a season. He had found himself altogether foiled, baffled, defeated; he had been unable to induce Him Whom he assailed to sin, nor had he gained in any way that other purpose in his assault which the Fathers attribute to him, and discover from our Lord whether or no He were the Incarnate Son of God Who was to redeem the world. So there came a pause and a change, — as so often happens in the spiritual life of those who serve God. Trial, temptation, desolation pass away, and a period of consolation and joy succeeds. The angels came and ministered to His wants, for as He had not chosen to strengthen the forces of His Sacred Humanity on that occasion, and was fain to feel the famishing and exhausting hunger natural after a fast of forty days, so also He did not refuse the relief

sent to Him by the Eternal Father, by means of the angels. He received at their hands some marvellous and restoring food which repaired the exhaustion and lightened the sufferings of His body. Thus in His Sacred Humanity He also ate the Bread of Angels, as if He would go before us even in this. He had recourse to the ministry of those whom He had created, as if He would let us see in Him some image of our own need in the desert of this life, and amid the temptations of the evil one, to have the food of angels perpetually set before us in the banquet of Holy Communion, of which this repast was a type and figure. So I take this morning this one circumstance of the history set before us in the Gospel, as turning our thoughts naturally once more to the fruits of Holy Communion, which we have been considering together these three last Sundays.

We have seen, my brethren, that St. Thomas has told us that the twelve fruits of the tree of life, our Lord's precious Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament, are to be classed under three heads, which correspond to three great divisions of our miseries which it is their appointed office to remedy. These are the chains which sin has cast over our souls, so that we are in the power of the tempter who tempted our Lord, that we have the fire of concupiscence within us, that our souls are stained, that God has still some ground of displeasure in us. These are the worst and most deadly of our wounds. Besides these there are miseries and infirmities which haunt us, in the first instance, because of the weak-

- ness of our nature; but which are enhanced and made more dangerous by our sins and negligences, our want of light, our want of love, our want of joy, our want of force and constancy. The Blessed Sacrament heals them all, as we saw, and now then, that it has given us all these gifts, what further work remains for our Lord to do in His capacity of healer of every wound and restorer of every loss?
- 1 When He has strengthened us against Satan, and tamed our lower nature, and wiped away the stain of our souls, and made us pleasing and lovely in the sight of His Father, when He has enlightened us, kindled charity in us, and given us spiritual joy, and endowed us with strength and perseverance, what more can He do for us? St. Thomas tells us that there is more for Him to do. All these blessings which we have been considering are limited in their immediate, though not in their indirect effect, to our souls and to our present condition, and we have also, body as well as soul, to be prepared for our endless life in the presence of God. The seed which is to spring up into so glorious an existence after our resurrection is to be sown here.
- 1 When our Lord speaks of the Blessed Sacrament in His discourse in St. John, He repeatedly connects it with the possession of everlasting life—"He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the Last Day." And again still more forcibly—"This is the bread that came down from heaven. Not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead. He that eateth this bread

shall live for ever." Here, my brethren, is one of those difficult sayings of our Lord which, when they are more closely looked into, yield us some special treasure of sacred doctrine and truth. Our Lord, you see, contrasts the Blessed Sacrament to the manna in this respect, that those who ate of the former died, while those who eat of the latter shall live for ever. What does this mean? Is it not true that we shall all die, and that those who communicate are no more saved from the sentence of death passed on Adam than those old fathers of the Jews who ate of the manna and died? Yes, surely, we must all die; but the true Bread which came down from heaven, the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, has a power /- which the manna had not; it has the power of being the seed and principle of the everlasting life, /- not only of the soul, but of the body also, to those who feed upon it. When we expand this truth which our Lord here lays down, it comes to this. Adam before his fall was immortal, in soul and body, though not in the same way in each; he was immortal in soul by the essence of his spiritual nature, he was immortal in body by the condition of his preternatural elevation. God placed in the middle of the Garden of Paradise the tree of life, and Adam fed upon it, and by virtue of that food he was to be preserved from all ill, all disease, all decay, all that bears the name or the semblance of death, and if he had persevered in the grace of God he would have passed without death, when his time of probation had been accomplished, into

the endless enjoyment of God's presence in heaven. And when Adam fell, this everlasting life of the body, the effect of eating of the tree of life, was forfeited by him for himself and his descendants, as well as the life of grace and glory for his soul. His soul was essentially and naturally immortal, and that immortality was not taken away, as it was not taken away in the case of the fallen angels. But he lost the immortal life of glory, as also the present life of grace. But this last was restored to him on his penitence. For the sake of Jesus Christ, the promised seed of the woman who was to crush the head of the serpent, the guilt was done away. Still the sentence of death remained, the temporal punishment of that single sin, which we all undergo, and so God said, "Now therefore lest, perhaps, he put forth his hand and take of the tree of life, and eat and live for ever; and so He sent him forth out of Paradise and placed before it cherubim and a flaming sword turning every way to keep the way of the tree of life." This is the Scripture account, and it surely implies that the formerly appointed means of everlasting life are taken away. If our bodies are to have everlasting life they must have it now by virtue of some new principle of life external to themselves, for in themselves they are but dust, and unto dust they must return. The manna in the wilderness was, as our Lord tells us, no such principle, those who ate of it died, and it had no power of securing them resurrection. But He says in the same breath that His Body and Blood

are such a principle. The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, glorious and immortal by right of its union with a Divine Person through the Soul which animated it, the Body which was only made capable of suffering by a special dispensation, and which was subjected to death for our sakes without being under the ban of death, the Body which was not suffered to see corruption, and was raised from death by the glory of the Father, which now glows with immortal life and the four glorious gifts, at the right hand of the Father, that Body has life in itself in such a way as to be the principle of life to all those to whom it is communicated. "For as the Father hath life in Himself, so He hath given to the Son also to have life in Himself; and as the Father raiseth up the dead and giveth life, so the Son also giveth life to whom He will."* "He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me." "He that eateth this bread shall live for ever." The Body of Jesus Christ will produce for the devout communicant the effect first of immortality, and then of the glorification of the body in everlasting life, to which life, whether glorious or not, we have no right or title or means, since we were shut out from the partaking of the tree of life in Paradise.

My brethren, I forbear, as it is only natural that I should in this place, from entering on the many most interesting questions which are suggested by the truth of which I have now been speaking. I content myself with removing one

* St. John v. 26, 21.

very obvious objection. Of course we know that all men are to rise again, though not all to rise to glory, and therefore it may be said that resurrection to life and glory cannot be the fruit of Holy Communion, because they are shared by those who do not receive Holy Communion. I content myself by answering simply with the holy doctors of the Church, that a certain result may be the proper effect of a sacrament of the Gospel, and yet may be gained without it in certain cases, though not without regard to the merits and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, the fruits of which are applied to us in that sacrament. Thus, Confirmation is meant to strengthen the soul, and give it a manly vigour that it be able to fight against the enemies of God, and yet this effect may be given apart from Confirmation. Penance is to heal the soul and cleanse it from sin by the virtue of the precious Blood, and yet in case of necessity contrition does the same where Penance cannot be had. And so even what our Lord has said about the necessity of eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood does not extend absolutely and exclusively to all cases whatever, for there are many cases in which the life of glory hereafter will be given to those who have had no opportunity of Holy Communion, and sanctifying grace through the merits of our Lord is the one essential condition for resurrection to glory. For the present question it is enough to say that St. Paul tells us, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all are made alive," though not all shall be made alive to the life of glory. Our Lord,

when He speaks of His power of giving life and raising from the dead, speaks in the same breath of His appointment as the Judge of all, and as all men must stand before the tribunal of the Judge, so all men must rise again in order to do so. This effect is the fruit of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is an extension in a certain degree of the gift of life which dwells in His Body to the bodies of all who are His brethren by nature; and the direct, formal, full, legitimate manner ordained by God for the communication of this virtue of the Body of Jesus Christ to the bodies of others, is the receiving of His Body in Holy Communion. This is enough for our present purpose, and when I add that we must remember also that our bodies are not only under sentence of death as well as our souls, but that even the life which is granted us is very short, fleeting, feeble, and uncertain, far shorter by the decree of God than human life originally was in the ages which succeeded the Fall, and in the second place that we have been cast out of the happy Paradise and home in which God placed our parents, as a part of our sentence of death, and that this earth in which we now find ourselves is truly and really a place of exile and punishment, we shall have reminded ourselves of all that is necessary to enable us to understand the last class of wounds, of which as St. Thomas tells us, we are healed by Holy Communion.

These wounds the holy Doctor calls generally death. Our nature lies under the bondage of sin, under the want of grace, and under the sentence

of death. Or rather, that sentence has already been partly executed upon it. We are, as it were, in a sort of living death. The first special wound of this kind he calls the debt of everlasting death; the second is the rapid flow and shortness of our life as far as it is good; the third is the misery of our condition here as exiles from our home; the fourth is the sentence passed on our bodies that they are to fall to nought, for dust they are, and unto dust they must return. Now, as to the first, we have already seen, my brethren, how the Blessed Sacrament in Holy Communion remedies this wound. The eternal death of the soul in separation from God is the wage of sin. That is forgiven us for the sake of our Lord, yet we have seen that some relics of sin remain upon us, and these are healed by Holy Communion. But this sentence of death is here spoken of specially as applying to our bodies, and we have already explained, following the Fathers of the Church, how the Holy Communion supplies the cause of what is wanting—that is, a resurrection unto an immortal life in the bodies also of those who receive it devoutly. It is all summed up in those wonderful words of our Lord to His Father in His great prayer before the Passion: “The glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them.” He won from His Father the glorification of His Body, and that He had by right before, He needed it not for Himself and He has given it to us; and this text of St. John is particularly explained of the Blessed Sacrament by some of the ancient Fathers.

What a thing it is to think, my brethren, that at Holy Communion we have given us a title to the glory of Christ in heaven! that our bodies, into which we receive that heavenly food, are by-and-bye to be quickened by it unto newness of life, to soar up to the abode of God Himself, and there to remain, the tabernacles of immortal and beatified souls for ever and ever! "For we know," as St. Paul says,* "that if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." This is the everlasting life which derives as its fruit from Holy Communion, the new tree of life, and by means of it the old man is repaired, we have made our way beyond the cherubim and flaming sword, which no longer bar the way. Then as to the second wound, death is not only our certain and allotted portion, but how soon it comes! How short is the time that we have left us to labour for eternity! My brethren, we do not realize this, because we do not know the value of time, we do not consider the difference between one degree of grace and a higher, between a number of good works and a few good works, when it comes to be measured out in results, in the difference between a higher and lower grade of glory in heaven. The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light; they rise up early and late, take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness; they steal from the night to prolong their days of work; they think they can never have enough of this world's

* 2 Cor. v. 1.

goods, and of time in which to labour for their acquisition ; they would be glad if there were more — | hours in the day, more days in the week, more months in the year, more years in human life, in order to labour for the meat or the gold that perisheth and that can do nothing for them towards the salvation of their souls. And we hear of Christians who are glad to kill time, as they say—time that is our best friend ; glad to throw away the possession which is the key of the exhaustless treasure-houses of eternity ! We cannot enter into the thought of the Patriarch Jacob, who told the King of Egypt, “The days of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years, few and evil, and they are not come up to the days of the pilgrimage of my fathers.” Few and evil are the days of the longest life, unless they are rich unto God ; and this wound of our condition our Lord heals in the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion, not by lengthening out our life, not by giving us back the years of the pilgrimage of our fathers, but in a far better and more loving way, by giving us, by virtue of our union with Him, a power of living many years in a short time, like that saint of whom the Wise Man says, “He being — | perfected in a short time, fulfilled long years, because his soul was pleasing to God,” a power of working fruitfully, vigorously, profitably, of multiplying merits and laying up great treasure in heaven. “He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit,” and the devout and frequent communicant has these blessed words most amply fulfilled in himself. Our days are few indeed, few in themselves, short,

if we consider the time that is given us in them to work for eternity. Childhood is cut off, and much of old age, and the necessary rest required by body and mind, and times of disease and other periods of incapacity, make a large deduction from what remains, even if we live to the three score years and ten, which the holy writer assigns to us. You know how often we lament over the death of some great man, some genius in science, some light of literature, some star of poetry, some support of the State, some guide and leader of nations, how we lament the fate, as we call it, that bids them leave their work half done, their promise unfulfilled, the benefits they might have bestowed on their fellows undispensed ! We seem to think that they have but just learnt to do good or great works, and then, as they are beginning to use their knowledge, they are cut down by death. Their stores of learning or experience are buried with them, the sun of their genius sets before it has half climbed to the meridian. Far more sad would be the unaccomplished promise of the Christian career, the virtues unattained, the services of God uncompleted, the battles half fought, the crowns half won, if it were not that the Holy Communion had been given to us to enable us to multiply merit and work swiftly for God before the night falls upon us in which no man can work !

And so as to those other two wounds. This world is a place of exile, where even the saints labour and are burthened, and groan because they are absent from their God. But then we have the blessed fulfilment of those last words of our Lord to His

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Apostles, "Lo! I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world." "Go forth, teach all nations"—go on a pilgrimage, go on a warfare, go into a desert, go into exile and labour for Me, but lo, I am with you all days, even unto the end. My brethren, it is the Blessed Sacrament alone that makes the earth a home for the Christian during his pilgrimage. Jesus Christ is the delight, the centre of the joys of heaven; His presence makes it what it is; because He is there, it is the home of the blessed. Jesus Christ is here, too, not in the splendour of His glorious existence, but really and truly under the sacramental veils, the comfort of the afflicted, the strength of the strong, the light of the wise, the food of the hungry, the Father of the poor, the Companion and Friend and Teacher and Spouse of every Christian soul. No one can be lonely, no one can be companionless or homeless, no one can want a friend, a guide, or a support who knows what Jesus Christ is to those who receive Him devoutly. He is the true manna, the bread that came down from heaven. He is with us in our journey through the wilderness to the promised land, He accompanies us in the Holy Viaticum in our journey out of this world into the next.

And then, last of all, our years of exile are passed, the short space of time allotted to us in which to work for eternity is over, and our bodies fall into the dust from which they were made. But even then, dust as they are, they have not shaken off the blessing which they have received by contact with the Body of Jesus Christ. "I am

the Resurrection and the Life," He said of Himself, and the power of His resurrection and life clings ever to the bodies of those who have been fed upon Him. The virtue of Holy Communion is with them, even in the grave. "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." "The first man Adam," says St. Paul, "was made into a living soul, the last Adam into a quickening spirit."* We have already spoken for a moment of the principle of life conferred upon our bodies by virtue of the Blessed Sacrament; but if we are to complete our dealing with this subject, we have yet to dwell on the qualities with which that life is to be adorned, which also are the fruits of Holy Communion. And you know, dear brethren, how vain it is for us to attempt to give an account to ourselves of the particular features and details of that blessed state as to which we have the assurance both of prophet and apostle, that the eye hath not seen what it is, nor the ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.† Yet we know, also, that holy writers have gathered hints or fragments of the truth in this respect, partly from the descriptions in the Gospels of the glorious condition of our Lord's Body at the Transfiguration, partly from what we are told later of the same Body after the Resurrection, and partly from other places of Scripture in which mention is made of the glories of the saints of God. And from all these sources we gather

* 1 Cor. xv. 45.

† 1 Cor. ii. 9, quoting Isaias lxiv. 4.

enough to feed our hopes upon, enough to encourage us in that perpetual warfare with our corruptible flesh which it is now our duty and our best wisdom to wage, enough to make us expect some wonderful blessedness and glory and delight as the fruit of our union with our Lord. For the glory and felicity and perfection of the soul, which beholds God, is thus to reflect and express itself in the body, which will glow with ineffable light and be endowed with heavenly powers and ennobled faculties, as befits the temper and instrument and companion of a glorified spirit. Each sense and member, as each power and faculty of the soul itself, will be satisfied in the perfect possession of the happiness for which God has made it fit. Holy writers speak of four special general gifts, which to our ideas are more than names, though we cannot expect in our present state of weakness and exile to form a due conception of their full development. There is the gift of clarity; for the just shall shine, as our Lord tells us at the close of one of His parables, like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father, and as light itself passes through substances that meet its path, even as our Lord passed through the stone which lay over the door of His sepulchre, or through the door of the room in which the Apostles were assembled for fear of the Jews on the day of His Resurrection, so also are the bodies of His glorified saints to be gifted with the power of penetrating subtlety of which the Fathers speak. And again, as light shoots, with a swiftness that reminds us of the speed of thought, from one end of the heavens

to the other, and as our Lord Himself passed, as it seems at will, after He was risen from the dead, from Emmaus to Jerusalem or from Jerusalem to Galilee, and no one could trace His footsteps, so in like manner we are told that a gift of the same sort, which goes by the name of the gift of agility, shall render the bodies of the blessed able to pass from place to place with the speed of light. And lastly, these bodies which now seem made to suffer, which are in themselves so weak and frail, in perpetual decay and continual need of support and reparation, these same bodies will be strengthened with a new and marvellous life, which no fatigue can impair, no pain touch or affect, no disease taint or weaken, no death nor shadow of death approach or hurt. "They shall no more hunger nor thirst, neither shall the sun fall upon them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall rule them, and shall lead them to the fountains of the waters of life, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." *

* Apoc. vii. 16, 17.

SERMONS

BY THE

REV. ALFRED WELD,

Of the Society of Jesus.

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SERMON XVII.

ON THE CHARITY OF CHRIST.

EPHES. ii. 4, 5.

Deus autem, qui dives est in misericordia, propter nimiam caritatem suam, qua dilexit nos, et cum essemus mortui peccatis, convivificavit nos in Christo (cujus gratia estis salvati).

But God, Who is rich in mercy, for the exceeding charity with which He has loved us, even when we were in sin, hath quickened us together in Christ, by Whose grace you are saved.

IT has been said by a great master in theology, my dear brethren in Jesus Christ, that a devout meditation of the Passion of our Divine Lord is of more value to the soul than fasting on bread and water, disciplining oneself to blood, or reciting daily the whole Psalter of David, and it is a common teaching of spiritual writers, that devotion to the sufferings of Jesus Christ is an unerring path to the highest perfection. It is not my intention to-day to describe to you in detail this sacred mystery. You will have many opportunities during the course of this week of giving attention to this holy subject; but I wish to put before you some considerations which will engage you to follow it with admiration and love, and lead you henceforth

to make it more than ever a capital point in the practice of your religion. There is no Christian to whom the sight of a crucifix is not a thing of every day. If there is any object that Christianity has rendered familiar to the world, it is the figure of a Man nailed with outstretched arms to a cross. We place it above our altars, we carry it on our breasts, we hang it over our pillows, and we kneel before it when we approach God in prayer. It is in the windows of our shops, at the corners of our streets, thousands live by the manufacture of it. We discuss its artistic merit, the expression of its features, the anatomy of the limbs; it is the highest effort of art to represent it. But what soul has ever once penetrated the mystery which it declares? The Cross of Christ, my dear brethren, is an unfathomable mystery, an ocean whose depths we can never sound, an abyss of love in which the human mind is lost, as its length and breadth and height and depth are alike immeasurable, but one into which no one enters who does not discover countless treasures for his soul, and issue forth loaded with precious riches of wisdom and love. I propose to give you some thoughts to help you to enter into this abyss, and teach you to meditate and worship this mystery of infinite love.

It all lies in this, my brethren, that the Son of God voluntarily suffered the extremity of torments in body and soul, and the most cruel death, for the love of us: "For that exceeding charity wherewith He has loved us,"* according to those words, "I am

* Ephes. ii. 4.

come that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."* I shall try to develope for you some of the thoughts contained in these words, that you may learn how great was this love.

Fix your eyes then, brethren, on the Cross, whilst the life-blood of that Victim is fast streaming away; the pulsations of His Heart are sinking; His eyes are growing dim, while that most tremendous event, so far surpassing the creation of the universe, the sacrifice of our redemption, is about to be accomplished, and let your faith acknowledge with the centurion, "Truly this is the Son of God!" You know how much the dignity of the person affects the value of an act. "I was playing in the streets," says St. Bernard, "when sentence of death was passed against me. The only Son of the King heard of my misery. He came forth from His palace, put aside His diadem, clothed Himself with sack-cloth, sprinkled ashes on His head, and with bare feet, went out to execution. Shall I continue my play?"

If a temporal prince so sacrificed himself for his subject, for his dearest child, who would have words wherewith to express his admiration? Let each one ask this question of his heart: with what words would you express your admiration and your love were you that favoured subject for whom his prince had gone to humiliation and death?

Brethren, we have here the Eternal Son of God, before Whom all creation, all greatness, all glory, is as a shadow, as nothing. All this universe has come

* St. John x. 10.

into existence by His power, and would perish at His word. "But if Thou turnest away Thy face, they shall be troubled, Thou shalt take away their breath, and they shall fail, and shall return to their dust."* It is He Who cast the rebel angels into eternal fire like a flash of lightning from heaven, Who had no need of creatures, but reigned in infinite beatitude with the Father and the Holy Ghost in His eternity. It is He Who is bleeding and dying on the Cross.

Though your faith teaches you, my brethren, that there is but one Person in Jesus Christ, it is difficult for you to realize that He Who hangs there upon the Cross enduring the extremity of opprobrium and pain, is the same Person of Whom St. John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," and Isaias—"I am, I am the Lord, and there is no Saviour beside Me."† Yet it was so. It was the same Person Who said, while hanging on the Cross, "I thirst," and of Whom the Evangelist wrote—"And bowing down His head, He expired;"‡ as He to Whom it is said by the Father from all eternity—"Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee," and—"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever."§

In the singleness of the divine nature this twofold order of truths was impossible, but in His exceeding charity for us He took to Himself a human nature, and walked the earth, hiding His majesty as if He had been mere man like ourselves. It was the human nature

* Psalm ciii. 29.

† Isaias xliii. 11.

‡ St. John xix. 30.

§ Heb. i.

that was dissolved, the veil of the divinity that was rent, but it was God Who suffered, it was God Who died, as truly as it was God Who created the world. It was the Person Who died in the dissolution of His mortal nature, and that Person was God infinite and incorruptible in the majesty of His divinity in which He reigns for ever and ever. This then is the mystery of mysteries, beyond the power of all created beings to fathom, the love and condescension which induced Him to work so great a prodigy, to suffer such real and terrible torments. There is but one explanation of it—"For the exceeding charity with which He has loved us;" as He Himself said to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting."*

I said, my dear brethren, that Jesus Christ suffered voluntarily. It was His own free act for love of us. The act of one Who knew all the consequences, both the terrible cost to Himself and our ingratitude; He knew how sin would still rage in the world, and how men would hate Him even where He had loved most. But all this was nothing; such was the love which He bore for our souls. The Holy Scripture tells us—"He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth."† We know, too, that even for the salvation of the world, the redemption of the Cross was not a strict necessity. God could have freely forgiven the human race. A judge upon earth may not forgive a

* St. John iii. 16.

† Isaias liii. 7.

crime without wounding justice, because he is only the administrator of the law of which he also is a subject. But God, being the Supreme Lord of all things, is Himself the absolute Master and the Law of the universe, and it is against Himself that sin is committed. There would then have been no violation of justice had He freely pardoned the guilt of our first parents. But it was better for us that He should expiate it. He against Whom the sin was committed, He Who might with justice have cast the whole human race for ever from Him, Who even in His love, wishing to show mercy, might have done so at no cost to Himself, chose Himself to bear the full penalty, and thus atone adequately for the sins of the whole world, because this was better for us than any other way by which mercy could have been shown us, "for that exceeding charity with which He has loved us." O brethren, bow yourselves down in admiration and love before that Cross on which your God is expiating your own guilt, in the excess of His infinite love for you!

It is quite true that Jesus Christ is said to have been "obedient to His Father even unto death," and He Himself on more than one occasion said that it was necessary for Christ to die, but, you must remember, that necessity was consequent on the eternal decree that Christ should suffer; but that eternal decree and will of God was the will not only of the Father, but also of the Son. The will of the Three Persons of the Divine Trinity being but one and the same identical will, as they

have but one and the same identical nature, so it is rigidly true that "He was offered because it was His will," His will to suffer and die for us from all eternity, before man was created, before the angels had come into being, before the foundations of the universe were laid. Jesus Christ was truly sent by the Father because He proceeded from Him as His only-begotten Son. He was, therefore, truly obedient to Him in His human nature; but it was an obedience of free and willing love for us, consequent on His own eternal will and decree. And this having gone forth from eternity, owing to the immutability of God, it was then necessary that Christ should suffer. I may add that, in a certain sense, it was necessary in a yet higher manner; because nothing else would satisfy the demands of His love. His love for man, like a fire which rages in a forest, and spreads on every side, in spite of all obstacles, overcame all that could be opposed to it, even what was due to the majesty and sanctity of the Son of God; so that he could say with the mouth of His prophet, "Can a woman forget her infant so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee in My hands."* God then, my brethren, could justly have left man in his sin, or He could have forgiven him without cost to Himself; but He would rather exercise His love than display His majesty, and He chose to redeem us, "for the exceeding charity with which He loved us."

* *Isaias* xlix. 16.

And now let us consider briefly what He suffered, that we may see better what this love was. The greatest of theologians tells us that the sufferings of Christ were universal, and the greatest of human sufferings. Let us glance rapidly at them, and you will see there was wanting nothing to make the measure full. He grieved adequately for all the sins of the world. God heaped upon His sacred Soul the full bitterness and wrath due to all the sins that ever had been, or ever will be, committed. Some among you may know what it is to be overwhelmed with bitterness of heart. You will judge, then, what must have been His bitterness, Who knew fully and perfectly the malice of sin, and saw the whole sins of the world heaped, as it were, ruthlessly upon His Soul, with all their hideous deformity so abominable to His infinite sanctity, and grieved for them to the measure of their full desert, as if they had been His own. It is far past the powers of our souls to conceive it; but He has told us Himself what it was—"My Soul is sorrowful, even unto death." It was only the power of the Godhead that sustained His Humanity, because the measure of His sufferings had not yet satisfied the exigency of His love.

Think, then, what it is for a noble nature to be insulted and despised, to be ranked with criminals and fools, to be outraged with every mark of contempt and ignominy before a whole people. What an indignity must it have been to Him, bearing on His brow the infinite nobility of the Son of God, and with it all that perfection and sensibility of

heart and feelings which belonged to the most exalted and sympathetic nature that was ever created, or can be conceived, when that vast multitude who had gathered together from all parts, and now crowded the streets of Jerusalem, many of whom beheld Him for the first time, saw Him as one of three criminals, executed amidst ignominy and cruel torments, and the most abject of men—"A Man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity; and His look was, as it were, hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed Him not."*

Here was that additional injury of the pretence of justice and a mock trial, that it might go down to future generations that He had been tried and found guilty and executed for His crimes. Here also was the ingratitude of those whom He had loved, of that very people He had loaded with such benefits, of whom probably many had been cured from leprosy or freed from devils by His sacred hand, now crying out with a rage that filled the Pagan Pilate with amazement, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" so as to force from him that sad and touching appeal, showing how much he was moved, "Thy own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee to me; what hast Thou done?"† Pilate had sat in judgment over criminals of the blackest hue, men monstrous for their crimes even in pagan eyes, but never yet had he seen the whole city crowded to suffocation with pilgrims from all the regions to which the Jewish nation had now spread, wild with commotion, and clamouring with such demoniacal fury for the blood

* Isaias liii. 3.

† St. John xviii. 35.

of any one of them. Well might he ask, "What hast Thou done?" O my Jesus, you had given yourself up for love of me, you were bearing my sins, and going to a cruel death that I might have life, and have it abundantly.

And what, brethren, shall I say of Barabbas? I shall only ask you to consider your own feelings when another is undeservedly preferred to you. You know how keen are the feelings of shame when you are passed over in the smallest occurrences of life. Consider that, and then tell me what it must have cost the Heart of our Divine Lord to have been held more criminal, less deserving of mercy, than a seditious murderer whose name to the end of time will be a proverb of brutal iniquity.

But there was something yet worse than this, there was the treason, the violation of sacred confidence of His most trusted friend: "For if My enemy had reviled Me, I would verily have borne with it; and if he that hated Me had spoken great things against Me, I would perhaps have hidden Myself from him, but thou a man of one mind, My guide and My familiar, who didst take sweet-meats together with Me, in the house of God we walked with consent."* It was for our good that He should bear even this, that His death should be brought about through the treachery of an Apostle.

Yet more. What is so great a sting to a noble soul as the reproach of utter and absolute failure? What had become of His Church built upon a rock, which was to withstand all the onsets

* Psalm liv. 13.

of the world and of hell? Where was His boasted reform, the regeneration of His people? Where were those multitudes whom He had cured, whom He had fed in the desert? Where even were His disciples, the chosen pillars of the edifice He had come to build? One had betrayed Him, their chief had denied with oaths and blasphemies that he ever knew Him, the rest had fled from Him, and He Himself was expiating His folly by a felon's death, in company with others only less wicked than Himself. So said the Pharisees, and it was with the full ignominy of this reproach that He breathed His last.

I have said, brethren, that His friends abandoned Him; but His cup was not full. It pleased the Eternal Father to visit Him, His own beloved Son, with the wrath due to the sins He bore, and to take away from Him that joy and consolation which He felt in giving Himself up for the salvation of the world, and in sacrificing Himself to the will of His Heavenly Father. By an unspeakable mystery, which more than all else reveals to us the abyss of sin and the immensity of love, He allowed a shadow, as it were of dereliction, to pass over that sacred Soul. Listen to this, brethren, He Who knew Himself to be the Son of God, Whose human Soul never lost the beatific vision from the first instant of its creation, nevertheless suffered in this blessed Soul, in a certain most mysterious but real manner, the pangs of separation from God, and in a true and terrible agony of soul, compared with which the agony of His Body was as a sweet repose, He exclaimed with a voice that penetrated the heavens,

"My God, My God, why hast Thou abandoned Me?" No words can tell what must have been the grief that wrung that cry from Him from Whom no torment of the scourge or the Cross could force a sigh.

Let us now briefly, my brethren, pass over in mind the sufferings in His sacred Body—His nakedness, His thirst, the gall that was given Him in cruel mockery, the cords with which He was bound and dragged with violence down steep declivities and up again, His bare feet torn by the stones from the rude haste with which He was forced along. Remember how He was kept all that night, after being seized in the garden, and the following day, without rest, harassed perpetually with insults, with painful journeys, rude questionings and tortures, till, when nature was sinking with want of food and rest, to say nothing of His other torments, He received for a bed the cruel rack of the Cross, which He Himself had to carry through that dreadful pilgrimage to the Mount of Calvary. I need not describe to you the agony of that Crown of Thorns which caused such copious streams of blood to flow from the deep wounds in His sacred head; nor how, that nothing might be wanting, He was brutally scourged till, as we have been told, shreds of His sacred flesh were scattered over the court of Pilate, and that Blood which was the redemption of the world sprinkled not only the executioners, but even the by-standing crowd, and made a ghastly pool at the foot of the column, so that the prophet could say of Him, "From the

sole of the foot to the top of the head there is no soundness therein ; wounds and bruises and swelling sores. They are not bound up nor dressed, nor fomented with oil."* And all this the prelude to that last sad journey through Jerusalem, goaded on by the furious populace and the Pharisees now maddened with the triumph of hatred, to have His hands and His feet pierced with rude nails, and His mangled Body made to hang by those four wounds, which pierced His sacred flesh, and whence poured out His life-blood for the three hours of most dreadful agony.

My dear brethren, all this and much more that the meditation of a life could never fathom was suffered by our good God, for no other end but "the exceeding charity with which He loved us." I have said that it was not necessary even for our forgiveness antecedent to His own eternal decree, but He wished to show us His love in such a way that nothing in life or death might ever make us forget it. He chose to redeem us at so terrible a cost, that every one who looks on that Cross lifted on high like the serpent in the desert, might know the love of God for man, and loving Him in return might be healed. It is written in the Book of Ecclesiasticus, "Forget not the groanings of thy mother ; remember that thou couldst not be born but through them."† And shall we ever forget the lashes and thorns and nails, the opprobrium and afflictions with which He redeemed us to a new life. He suffered all these things, says St. Thomas, that being convinced of His love for

* *Isaias* i. 6.† *Ecclus.* vii. 29.

us, we should in our turn love Him, as it is in this love that consists the perfection of our salvation. It was borne to purchase our love; see then, brethren, how greatly He values it. A father who would redeem a loving child from slavery counts not his silver or his gold, but pours out all his treasures to gain the object of his love. So our Divine Lord counted no treasures of earth or created gifts; no, not even His own precious Blood or His very life; but, as St. Bernard says, "having torn asunder the purse He poured out the whole price of our redemption upon the ground." He could have saved us without suffering for us, but He could not have saved us without winning our love, and like the man who had found a treasure in a field, a treasure indeed in the barren field of this world, worthy of the affection of God Himself, He went straight and gave all that He had to purchase it, even His most precious Blood and life itself. Learn this, brethren, from the sight of your crucifix; never look at it without thinking what an ocean of love is revealed in those outstretched arms, that emaciated frame, those streams of blood, and think, if you can, of what your hearts must be composed if you refuse to love Him in return; and if yet you cannot love Him, say with St. Augustine: "Take, O Lord, from my breast this heart of stone, and place in its stead a heart of flesh," that I may melt with love of Thee.

There is another motive of love, my dear brethren, which I must explain to you in a few words. It was better for us that Christ should suffer, because He could thus give us by example lessons of the

most heroic virtues. "Leaving you an example," says St. Peter, "that you should follow His steps, . . . Who when He was reviled did not revile ; when He suffered He threatened not, but delivered Himself to him that judged Him unjustly."* In the Passion of Jesus Christ, we have lessons of divine perfection for every difficulty and trial of life. It is a compendium of all His teaching, a summary of His life. To point out the virtues He taught us in His life, it would be enough to show those which He exercised in His sacred Passion.

There is no trial you may not be called upon to meet and overcome if you wish to secure the salvation of your souls ; and on that account our loving Lord would show us in His own most sacred Passion, and to His own most terrible cost, how we are to conduct ourselves when under such trials. What insult can you ever have to bear which was not heaped ten-fold and a thousand-fold upon Him ? Where else, then, need you look for a model of sweetest patience and meekest humility, when you are overwhelmed with contempt and disgrace ? Who that needs a lesson of silence under false accusation, or prudence and courage when it is good to speak, need look beyond the courts of Caiphas or Pilate ? If we need lessons of fortitude in suffering, contempt of the world, sacrifice of the flesh, abandonment of all things, resignation to the will of God, forgiveness of enemies, care of one's own in the midst of torments, patience with their failings, constancy of purpose amidst an agony of blood, and obedience such as

* 1 St. Peter ii. 21, 23.

"gave His Body to the strikers, and His cheeks to them that plucked them,"* we shall find it all here told in accents no less telling than when "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink."† He said those words standing in the Temple on the great day of the festival, but He said them again in deeds while hanging from the Cross on the great day of which the Jewish feast was the feeble type. His first lesson of evangelical perfection was from the Crib at Bethlehem, and His last from the Cross on Calvary.

There are many other lessons taught us in these sad days, not of that which happened in His own Person, but in the various actors in this tremendous mystery, yet comprehended in the Charity of Christ. What instruction may we not find in the weakness of the Apostles, the presumption of Peter, his selfish comfort-seeking whilst his Lord was being insulted in the house of Caiphas, his frequenting the company of the enemies of his Divine Lord, and that after the repeated warnings of his first and second sin; the avarice of Judas, and the hardheartedness which followed on it, which had grown by little and little, from the first small theft till even the Son of God at his feet, kissing them, as we may believe, and pouring into his soul words of the most tender charity and hope, failed to soften; the diabolical envy and hatred of the Jews, which show us the fearful depth of malice into which the human heart may be led; the weakness of Pilate, his hesitation, his expedients, his fear of doing his

* Isaias l. 6.

† St. John vii. 37.

duty, the swelling rage of the Jews as his vacillation increased till at last he, who should have dictated justice to multitudes, to whom God gave the noblest opportunity of an act of sublime justice ever given to man upon earth, that of vindicating the innocence of the Son of God, a man too of good intention, and velleity to do right, signed the decree of the most stupendous injustice which hell will ever witness; his fear of offending the populace and Cæsar, the dread of his consequent disgrace before the Emperor, and the opprobrium of his name unto all generations. Sinners have here too the proof that it is never too late, even in the last moment, to turn to God, and the fearful impenitence of the wicked thief shows them that even by the side of Jesus Christ, shedding His Blood for its salvation, a soul that has presumed on God's mercy may go forth from the body impenitent and unforgiven. All these lessons, and many more, our most loving Lord would teach us in this great mystery, that we might not have to fight the battle of life without a guide; and He is set before us to show us also the final triumph of the humiliation of the Cross, that, as St. Paul says, "you be not wearied fainting in your minds," but be strengthened in hope, "looking on Jesus, the author and finisher of faith, Who, having joy set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and now sitteth on the right hand of the throne of God."*

There is in this, my dear brethren, another reason why it was good for us that Jesus Christ should

* Heb. xii. 2.

suffer and die for us. It was to our eternal glory that we should ourselves merit the crown which His love destined for us. The merit of the least act of Jesus Christ in His mortal state was infinite. Who then will sum up the merit of all those years of toil and suffering, of His nine months in the prison of the womb, and of His most bitter Passion and Death? All this He has given to us. Through these merits, all those myriads of blessed infants that have received the waters of Baptism, and died before losing the innocence there obtained, are entitled to eternal glory and the infinite bliss of the beatific vision. Through these merits, every action we perform in the grace of God and in the spirit of faith, however small in its own nature, is entitled to its proper degree of this glory which, unless we cast it away by grievous sin, is stored up for us till the day of reckoning. This greatest of all gifts is essentially above our nature. We could not have taken even a step towards it. Jesus Christ owned it by birth-right as the only-begotten Son of God; and had therefore a full right to it, even in His human nature, but He chose to purchase it, that we too might be sons, and might have the inheritance through His merits, and that He might be more like to us, purchasing it for Himself and us, "through the exceeding great charity with which He has loved us," so that the Apostle could say, "Therefore now he is not a servant, but a son, and if a son, an heir through God."*

There is yet another thought, my dear brethren.

* Gal. iv. 7.

I shall touch it briefly, and leave it to your consideration. It will bear pondering often and deeply, and not to the end of our lives, no, not through the long contemplation of eternity, shall we ever fathom it. There is no more tremendous lesson of the malice of sin, even of a single sin, and of the awful alternative of salvation or damnation, than is suggested by the sight of the Son of God nailed to a Cross. "For you are redeemed with a great price. Glorify and bear God in your body."* A Father of the Church has said, that the condemnation of millions of angels to eternal flames is indeed terrible, but nothing so terrified him and taught him the abyss of sin as the sight of the Son of God upon the Cross. God does all things wisely. No act of God is out of proportion to the end proposed. What therefore must the malice of sin be, even of one sin, which you perhaps have committed so lightly, when it has stretched the Son of the Eternal Father upon the Cross and drained the life-blood of the Creator of the universe? We know the value of human things by the price paid for them. What then is the value of the soul of man, when the Son of God laid down His life in torments to purchase it? Where will you find a balance, brethren, to the life-blood of the Son of God? And will you yet sin?

I might add other thoughts to what I have said, showing you how wide and how deep is the love of Jesus Christ for us. I should rather say I should never cease to speak if I endeavoured to say all,

* 1 Cor. vi. 20.

how it embraces all our nature, and how it meets the most intimate cravings of our hearts. You know how much we rejoice when one of our own name, family, nation, or race has achieved an exploit that deserves the praises of men, how we take to ourselves the glory and feel ourselves ennobled by his greatness. The Son of God knew well this feature of our nature, and His love has not left it unsatisfied. In the long day of a glorious eternity every redeemed soul, from the Queen of Heaven herself to the infant that fled from the troubles of earth with the water of Baptism still fresh upon its brow, will exult in the glory which the angels have not got, that He from Whom all good comes in heaven and on earth, He Who has set to all creatures the example of infinite perfection amidst the most bitter tribulations, Who has won the greatest victory for which God or man ever fought, Who, by His triumph over death upon the gibbet of the Cross, has gained everlasting life for so many myriads of blessed creatures, is not only one of their race who was born from Adam, and paid the penalty of death like him, but is even the familiar friend and the brother of each one of them; and this is to each a glory not acknowledged before corrupt and sinful men, but before all the angels of God, and the Blessed Trinity itself. I have said enough, my dear brethren, to show you that in whichever way we look at it, the Passion of Jesus Christ is a stupendous mystery of unfathomable love which every creature who has a human heart in his breast must always look on with feelings of the tenderest compassion and the

most ardent love, and which it should be his happiness to cultivate by devout meditation and by every possible return of gratitude and love which, in His love, our Lord Himself has promised to many saints He will reward with His ineffable gifts.

SERMON XVIII.

ON THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

ST. JOHN iv. 10.

Si scires donum Dei, et quis est qui dicit tibi: Da mihi bibere, tu forsitan petisses ab eo; et dedisset tibi aquam vivam.

If thou didst know the gift of God, and Who it is that saith to thee, Give Me to drink, thou perhaps wouldst have asked of Him and He would have given thee living water.

THERE is no one among you, my dear brethren, who is ignorant how frequently our Divine Lord reproaches the Jews for their abuse of the graces given them by God. You know how He told the inhabitants of Corozain and Bethsaida that if Tyre and Sidon had had their graces, they would long since have done penance in sackcloth and ashes. You remember how He said to His disciples, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things which you see, for I say to you that many prophets and kings have desired to see the things that you see and have not seen them, and to hear the things that you hear and have not heard them."* And "the Queen of the South shall rise in judgment against

* St. Luke x. 24.

this generation and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon here."* You remember the parable of the servant who buried his talent in the ground, and who, though he kept it safe, was nevertheless cast away because he had not turned it to profit; and that when it is recorded that our Divine Lord wept over Jerusalem, the Evangelist tells us that He added, "because thou hast not known the day of thy visitation."

Now, my brethren, I wish to apply these lessons so full of instruction for us on whom God has heaped so many treasures of His grace, to one principal fountain of blessings which He has poured out upon us, which had not been given to the Jews, which was still too elevated and spiritual for their carnal minds when He would have revealed it to them, to which our Lord may have referred when He said to Nicodemus, "If I have spoken to you earthly things, and you believe not, how will you believe if I shall speak to you heavenly things?"† I refer to the bodily presence of our Divine Lord Himself in the midst of us, and the many springs of life and grace it has opened to us. There is so much to be said on this sacred subject, and the hearts of many amongst you are, I know, already so inflamed with love of it that I have reason to fear that the coldness of my words may only chill your hearts where God has Himself already kindled the fire of His love; but my sensibility of the fruit to be

* St. Matt. xii. 42.

† St. John iii. 12.

derived from a devout meditation of this mystery, and the near approach of the solemnity of its institution and of the great feast of Easter have made me believe that it would be useful to give you some thoughts on this divine gift.

It may seem to you strange that whereas three of the Evangelists relate the institution of this Sacrament almost in the same words, he who is called emphatically the Beloved Disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, who hung on His Heart at the Last Supper, and whom we may believe to have been more than any other penetrated with this mystery, seems, at first sight, to pass it by in silence. But it must be remembered that the chief object of this Evangelist was to supply what had been omitted by the other three, principally with respect to the Divinity of our Divine Lord. He had, moreover, already related in detail the promise which He had made to His disciples, that He would give them His flesh to eat. But in fact he does refer to it in words that cannot be mistaken: "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end." That is, to the end of His life, to the end of time, as St. Cyril and St. Augustine explain it according to these words, "Behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world." Or, as St. Chrysostom understands it, to the end or extremity of love, not only surpassing all He had hitherto done for us, but exceeding all that imagination could have pictured of the most exalted love, without beginning, without end and without limit, so that He could say, "What is there that I ought

to have done more for My vineyard and have not done it?"*

This mystery, my dear brethren, is called a memorial of all God's wonders. "He hath made a remembrance of His wonderful works, being a merciful and gracious Lord, He hath given food to them that fear Him."† It is the consummation of His design of giving Himself to His creatures in this life. It can only be called the last excess of the magnificence of God's love to our souls. On the one hand it is a mystery which ought to fill our souls with an admiration ever new, because its source is inexhaustible, and for each soul and each hour as true and as real as ever; like a river that is ever flowing away and yet ever full, always the same and yet always new. Souls that often meditate this mystery with devotion sometimes wake up suddenly to its presence, as if from a dream in which they have been playing with bubbles, to the full and conscious reality of life. They feel something which no words can express, something which says in their inmost soul—Here is a reality, here is the Source and Author of all things, here is my last end, here is my God in the flesh.

No doubt the human mind could never have originated such a thought as that God should give Himself to us as He has done, and it must always be to us as it is to the angels, a subject of stupendous amazement and admiration that God has so loved the work of His hands as to give Himself to us in so marvellous a manner, and we may believe that

* Isaias v. 4.

† St. John xiii. 1.

‡ Psalm cx. 4, 5.

nothing will more astonish our enlightened souls when the Eternal Sun shines upon us than the greatness of the gift we have been receiving, and the little account we have made of it. Nevertheless, now that He has been pleased to reveal it to us, we may see in it a part of the whole system of God's love. We seem to feel how like to God it is to give Himself to us in this way, so magnificent in His gifts, so boundless in His love for men; that as the gift of no created thing could satisfy His love for us, and having put all creation at our service, there was nothing left for His love but to give us Himself to be with us to the end of the world, to be our food and our holocaust, in fine, to be to us all that our banished souls could need, and this is what He has done.

“What is there that I ought to have done more
✓ for My vineyard, and have not done it?” Human nature, my dear brethren, is created for God; its highest being, even in this life, is to seek and find its all in Him. So noble is this soul that is within us that it is a degradation even to the meanest wanderer upon earth to seek its full repose in anything except in God, however great and noble that object may seem to be. At the same time we need some one near us whom we can love, one who can console us, strengthen us, and support us, one to whom we can have recourse in all our needs, in our afflictions and tribulations, when all the world abandons us, or persecutes us, one who can never fail us, one who knows all our wants, and whose power and love we can never doubt. No human friend, no created being

could supply this. God is indeed ever present to His creatures in His divine immensity, but this did not satisfy His love ; but as He has made us of flesh He vouchsafed to be present to us Himself in flesh, that His presence may be in a manner sensible to us, and that our whole nature may rejoice in God our Saviour. How perfect, my brethren, is this harmony, how admirably has He founded our nature, and how still more admirably has He disposed His gifts, that every need of it should be supplied, every weakness have its support, every desire be fulfilled ! "Come to Me," He says, "all ye who labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you." He Who is my Lord, my Creator and last end, the object of my worship, my God and my all, comes in the midst of us to be to each one of us our guide and our support in every trouble, and every trial and difficulty of our souls, even though it be seated in the deepest recesses of our hearts. Our friend, our counsel, our strength, our comforter, with power to remedy every evil that can hurt us, and with a love which no ingratitude can cool, there He is by day and by night, close at hand to us, inviting us to lay our burthens at His feet, and to be refreshed at the spring which he who drinks of will be refreshed unto eternal life.

It appears, too, that there is a special tendency in our nature to seek God present. We are created to His image, and for Him, and it belongs to our nature to tend ever to Him, according to those words of St. Augustine, "My heart is restless until it rests in Thee." In the law of nature God spoke imme-

diately to man, and those who served Him felt that He was near to them. In the Jewish law God was ever present in the rulers and prophets, through whom He spoke to His people; and showed Himself by wonderful prodigies, and by a certain mysterious presence in the Temple. Yielding unlawfully to this tendency men have become victims to the deceits of the devil so often representing himself as God, and hence the universality of idolatry and devil worship where the knowledge of the true God has been obscured. All this shows a yearning of our nature planted in it by God as a kind of promise of His presence among us in this most magnificent of His gifts, in which our Lord and our Creator vouchsafes Himself to satisfy all our wants, present to us under a visible sign which even the bodily senses can perceive.

Let me now call to your minds a thought which I am sure has often presented itself to you. You know how often when we think of human greatness, however exalted it may be, we remember that there is One greater Who possesses all greatness, and the same may be said with regard to human wisdom, or goodness, or love, or mercy, for we always feel that all this is limited; but that there is One Whose wisdom, and goodness, and love are without limit, Who is in fact Himself the infinite goodness. How does our soul sink into nothingness, and how does all the pride of this life vanish at this thought! Well, brethren, it is He Who is in our tabernacle night and day, pouring out His Heart to us; vainly offering us the waters

of eternal life, but we turn away and bury ourselves in the crowd of this world, and leave Jesus Christ alone and uncared for, grieving for our blindness, while myriads of blessed spirits prostrate themselves around Him, and offer Him the worship which we refuse Him.

It has been said that Jesus Christ so loves the human race that He could not wait till the next life to be ever with those who love Him, according to those words, "My delights were to be with the children of men;"* like a chief pastor who will not leave his flock alone to his shepherds, but follows it in all its wanderings, never loses it from his sight, and is ever at hand in the hour of its need.

So far, brethren, I have spoken to you only of our Lord's presence among us. I have yet to speak of the still further extension of the gift by which He gives Himself to each one of us for our food. Human words on this subject are indeed barren. God must speak to your souls Himself, and He will do so if you will often reflect Who it is you receive, and who you are that receive, and the circumstances and motives with which this divine gift is offered to you. The saints had no words to express what they felt on receiving Jesus Christ Himself into their breasts, but their hearts melted with indescribable sweetness and admiration at the goodness and condescension of their God. I shall endeavour to give you a few thoughts to carry away with you, to help you to meditate in your homes and before the altar. Wherever you may

* Prov. viii. 31.

✓ be in the whole world the altar is always the same; and the same treasure of your souls is in the tabernacle. Jesus Christ in this divine Sacrament is truly and really the food of our souls. ✓ Whatever effect food works in our corporal nature, that Jesus Christ Himself in a real and most exalted manner operates in the souls of those who receive him. No one is ignorant of the craving of our nature for its food, of the weakness, distress, exhaustion and death that accompanies the want of it, and, on the other hand, of the strength and growth and warmth and health and energy of life that are the result of good and wholesome nourishment. All this is provided for, and these gifts, and many others which have no counterpart in the body and which are as much more noble as the life of the soul is above that of the body, Jesus Christ gives to the soul of him who eats of this bread of life. "He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood abideth in Me and I in him. . . . He that eateth this bread shall live for ever."* And this, we must understand to be effected, not by His mere presence within us, but by virtue of His divine institution, that as He vouchsafed to be received by way of food into our bodies, so He would give Himself by this means to be really the food and the principle of eternal life for our souls. There is another consideration here very full of fruit for your salvation: the union of the food with the body is the most intimate we know of in nature. The food is incorporated into and becomes one with it. Jesus

* St. John vi. 57, 59

Christ has chosen this means of giving Himself to us to show us clearly that He wished to be united to our souls, and to lead us to understand how perfect that union is to which He vouchsafes to invite us even during the banishment of this life. What then must be the character of that union which He has prepared for us in our true country where He will give Himself to us as our crown! The union of food with the body consists in the food being, as we say, assimilated, or rendered like to its substance, and taken up into it. This, of course, is not what is meant when we speak of the union of the Body of Jesus Christ with our soul. The species or accidents of the Sacrament produce all the effect in the body which they would if they were ordinary food, but the sacred Body of our Lord, which is beneath these accidents in a spiritual way, acts directly and principally on the soul, unites it to itself by a union of love which it kindles in it, and assimilates it to itself. The degree of grace given depends on the fitness of the soul to receive it, and it proportionably elevates and clears the intellect for spiritual things, strengthens our desire of God and what is of God, gives firmness to the will, diminishes our craving after sensible things, increases our love of one another, softens our hearts, chastens our flesh, in fine, makes us, as far as we put no obstacle, more and more like to Himself; so that, instead of the food being made like to us, and transformed into us, and so partaking of our life, we ourselves become likened to this divine food which we eat, are formed after Him and partake

of His life, so that there remains, as it were, but one life between Jesus Christ and the soul, which is the Spirit of God dwelling within us, according to these words, "He that eateth Me, the same shall live by Me."* See, brethren, how Jesus Christ seeks to unite you to Himself; see what is the nature of this life which He gives you in this divine banquet; think of the depth of that love that has devised such a means of giving life to your souls, and think what should be the character of the life which your souls should lead after being fed from this tree of life, after being refreshed from this fountain of life itself; how pure should be your aspirations, how holy your desires, how united with Him your hearts, how great your hatred of sin, your contempt of the world, how true your love for one another who have been thus wonderfully united to the source of all charity, and how humble your hearts, how complete the desire of serving Him with which you approach to partake of this divine banquet. Try to understand from this mystery how ardently your God desires to give you life when the Creator gives Himself in so humble a form as to be the food of His creature.

I have yet to say a few words on the third motive which our Divine Lord had for giving Himself to us in the Blessed Eucharist.

Sacrifice, my dear brethren, is the first and highest duty of a creature, at least of a sinful creature, to its Creator. It has pleased God to give us a Sacrifice of the highest possible character, perfectly worthy of the infinite Majesty to Whom it is

* St. John vi. 57.

offered, which can perpetually be offered throughout the world, and in which the greatest extremity of God's love for men, our redemption by His death on the Cross, is unceasingly renewed and commemorated.

The Sacrifice of the Mass consists in this, that in memory of His death on the Cross, by the words ordained by Christ, His sacred Body and Blood are brought into that state of humiliation or annihilation as we may call it, of being confined within the space of the host or the chalice, subject to the will of man, and this as an act of supreme homage to the infinite majesty of God, and in atonement for sin, and for the other ends of sacrifice. Just as He subjected Himself to His executioners on Calvary, so here He is subject to the priest, however unworthy, whom the Church places at the altar, a prisoner as it were in his hands, bound mystically by the bond of infinite love for our souls. Upon the Cross the lifeless body of our Divine Lord hung motionless and senseless, His eyes saw not, His ears heard not, His flesh felt not, because He was truly dead, a victim sacrificed in blood, for as the Apostle tells us, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission."* On the altar is the same Victim, living and glorious indeed, "for Christ dieth now no more," but sacrificed by the act of the priest unto a sacramental death, in which His eyes do not see, His ears do not hear, His flesh does not feel. Like a lifeless body He is subject to all the treatment which we choose to inflict, we may insult it, may neglect it, and profane it. Our insults will

* Heb. ix. 23.

✓ be like the soldier's lance, for, inasmuch as He is in the Sacrament, He has stripped Himself of the ordinary functions of life, in order that He might truly be a victim and a sacrifice. It is a perfect likeness of death, and in this state of the most profound humiliation He lies upon the altar as truly a Victim of Sacrifice as He was when He hung with His head bowed down upon the Cross. I say, brethren, that in the sacramental state His senses do not operate, but yet He truly lives and sees and hears us. His glorious Soul is there, and there too is the Divinity that created us. From that little Host, and from that sacred Chalice, He sees the inmost depth of our hearts, and knows every want, every desire of our souls.

✓ Imagine then, brethren, for a moment that you stood before the Cross on that memorable day when the Son of God gave Himself a Victim in blood for the sins of the world, that you saw the blood stream down from His sacred Wounds, that you witnessed the earthquake, the darkness of the sun, and that you heard that last cry which pierced the whole multitude with terror, that you saw the Pharisees skulking away with fear at what they had done, while the multitude spoke only with bated breath, and the centurion cast down his lance, exclaiming, "Truly this was the Son of God."

If God gave you to be transported ~~there~~ in spirit, and to witness a scene so tremendous in the sight of all creation, but so sacred and blessed for us, would you not cast yourselves down and adore your God hanging on the Cross, and pour out your whole soul

in love and admiration for His goodness, and sympathy for His grief? Would you think of mere human things that day? Would you let any trifle tear you away from the Cross? Least of all would you join with the Pharisees in insulting Him? Brethren, let your faith take the place of your imagination. Your God is as truly present in the Mass, He is as truly sacrificed, not now by the shedding of His blood, but no less truly, and to the same effect; the difference being that He was offered once in blood to obtain pardon for our sins, and is offered now daily and hourly in an unbloody manner on our altars, to apply this pardon to the daily needs of the world, and not only for pardon, but chiefly that from every corner of the earth, and from every soul that assists at Mass, and who offers sacrifice, as the Church says, with the priest, there should be presented to the adorable Trinity at all times a perfect Victim, a sacrifice of supreme homage as well as a thanksgiving and a petition for all the wants of our souls and our bodies. This, brethren, is what your Faith teaches you; the frivolities of life would make you forget it. O my brethren, if you knew the gift of God, and Who it is that is present in your tabernacles, Who it is that gives Himself to you for your food, and Who it is that is offered on your altars, how different would be your conduct, how different your use of this heavenly gift. I say, if you but knew it, for such is the blindness of soul, which the whirl of worldly affairs brings with it, such the forgetfulness of even the most stupendous spiritual gifts which attends the running after the trifles of this

life, that the greater part of Christians are as if they knew not this gift in which God has poured out the extremity of His love and summed up all that heaven had most precious to bestow upon us.

There are three principal ways, brethren, in which you may exercise your devotion to this mystery. The first is by visiting Him in the tabernacle. Have you ever gone into a little church by the side of a great thoroughfare while the roar of life is drowning all outside, and thought of the abandonment of that sanctuary with nothing but the little lamp giving sign of the Divine life that is within the tabernacle? There He is day and night, morning and evening, bound captive by His love for you, but how unheeded, how neglected, while Christian and heathen hurry on in the torrent of life, alike eager after the things of this world, alike forgetful of their God consumed with love for them in the silent sanctuary.

Brethren, if it is sweet to a captive to be visited in his chains, if the sick find consolation in the sight of a friend by their bedside, if it is an act of piety to cast flowers on the tomb of one who has loved us; who is there that has a heart in his breast who will refuse to visit his Lord and his God held captive in the Holy Sacrament for the love of us, Who bore our infirmities to free us from them, and is there truly entombed the Victim of a sacrifice immolated for us. Your God is there to receive your worship, your Saviour Who has redeemed you from eternal perdition is there to receive your thanks, your Guide and Master is there Who will teach you all the lessons your souls need. And there, too, is your Lord, the

giver of all good gifts to replenish your souls with treasures unto eternal life. Think of the journeys you undertake to secure temporal riches, or to make a show of giving pleasure to men who have some little claim at your hands, and ask yourself what it would cost you to perform this act of service to your God so profitable at the same time to yourselves. A few steps to a church, perhaps no farther than to an oratory under your own roof, and yet your hearts are so cold that even if it occurs to you, the slightest reason is allowed to deter you from it. Brethren, if you but knew the gift of God, it would be hard to tear you from the foot of the altar, at least you would let no day pass, without joining yourself to the blessed spirits who crowd about the tabernacle, and find their beatitude in the contemplation of Him.

And now, brethren, what am I to say to you about receiving Him in the Holy Communion? If it is so profitable to you to visit Him, what must it be to receive Him into your heart, Who is at once the fountain and beyond all comparison the most noble and most abundant channel of divine grace. Remember, He is truly the Bread of Life, and gives us in the supernatural order all that the best of food can give to our bodies. Remember that in receiving Him you celebrate in the most perfect manner you can His triumph over His enemies, which are sin and hell; you participate in the most intimate manner in the commemoration of His sacred death, which was the condition of His acquired glory, and you fulfil the most ardent desire of His Heart, that of

applying the benefits of it to your own souls. If you knew, brethren, the consolation that the thought of future Holy Communion is to be received by the devout gave to His afflicted Heart in the days of His Passion, you would hasten to join yourselves to those who make this grateful remembrance of His infinite love, and offer Him in return this sacred pledge of their own. Again and still more earnestly, I must say to you, "if you but knew the grace of God," as you will know it, you would make haste, as you so easily may, to make up for the years in which you have neglected to profit by this divine gift.

Do not let the sacredness of this mystery, and the awful majesty of your God scare you from approaching, in the idea that no man can prepare himself worthily. True, brethren, the angels are not worthy in His sight, but remember, He has shorn Himself of His glory to enable you to approach Him, and has told us that it is not they that are in health who need a physician, but they that are ill.* St. Bernard says of Him in the crib, "Little is the Lord, and amiable exceedingly," but it was to be after His Crucifixion and in memory of it, in the humility of His Sacrament, where He resides in commemoration of His bloody sacrifice, that He would draw us all to Himself. "And I, if I be lifted from the earth, will draw all things to Myself."† One thing above all, brethren, must be attended to—take the means of preparation taught by the Church, and approach with an humble and contrite heart, and a desire to love Him above all things, and your com-

* St. Matt. ix. 12.

† St. John xii. 32.

munion will be an act of great glory to Him and rich fruit to your souls.

I must yet say one word of practice on the subject of the divine Sacrifice, and I have finished. If you would often reflect on what I have said as to the nature of this mystery, you would never let a day pass, if you could avoid it, without being present at it ; you would remember that there is not and could not be an act more pleasing to the Eternal Trinity, more glorious to the Son of God made Man and battling on earth against sin and hell, more salutary to the Church, or more beneficial to yourselves, than a devout assisting at the Holy Sacrifice. Remember those words which you have doubtless often read in the *Imitation of Christ*, "When a priest celebrates, he honours God, gives joy to the angels, edifies the Church, assists the living, gives rest to the dead, and makes himself a participator of all good." And remember that each one who assists, cooperates in the act of sacrifice, and becomes a partaker in the infinite treasures that flow from it.

Apply what I have said to yourselves, my brethren, each one according to his own circumstances, and be sure that you will soon reap a rich harvest in your own souls. If you are in habits of sin, you will find grace that you knew not of to lift you out of it, and if by God's goodness you already hate sin, you will find yourself helped rapidly to higher paths of God's service, till you will be able to run on in the odour of His sweetness.

SERMONS

BY THE

REV. WILLIAM H. ANDERDON,

Of the Society of Jesus.

S

OF these two sermons, the first was written some time ago, for another purpose; the second in haste, to complete the volume, and without opportunity of seeing the former. This may account for the too great similarity between them, in the general line of thought, and in the texts quoted.

W. H. A.

Roehampton, Month of Mary, 1875.

SERMON XIX.

THE CORNER-STONE A ROCK OF OFFENCE.

ST. MATT. xi. 6.

Beatus est qui non fuerit scandalizatus in me.

Blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in Me.

THERE is something very arresting in these words. Who would not expect a different conclusion from what had gone before? Our Lord, in answer to St. John's disciples, had proved His divine mission by the clearest evidence. Miracles, that could only be wrought by the power of God, attested Him to be indeed "He that was to come," and none other. Disease fled before Him; death obeyed Him, and yielded up its victims, for He was the Lord of life and death. The poor had the Gospel preached to them, for He was the gentle, compassionate Messiah. As we listen to His own account of His mission, we seem to hear the words of His prophet over again; words which He once distinctly applied to Himself. In the synagogue at Nazareth, quoting His servant Isaias, He said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me; wherefore He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor, He hath sent Me

to heal the contrite of heart, to preach deliverance to the captives, and sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of reward."*

Such being His mission, surely—reason would suggest—the human race, to a man, will look up and hail the advent of this Deliverer. They will crowd before Him with thankfulness, making their way to His feet over every obstacle: "laying aside every weight, and sin which surrounds" them, they will run to Him, as lepers to be cleansed, as needy, to be enriched, as ignorant of truth, to be enlightened. And, forasmuch as He condescends to visit them in their dungeon, dark as it is and foul with sin, offering to loose them from their fetters by a touch, bidding them rise and follow Him, they will come after Him "whithersoever He goeth," by the irresistible attraction of that sweetness, by the blessedness and new life of His invitation: "Draw us, we will run after Thee in the odour of Thy ointments."

What, however, are the words that immediately follow our Divine Lord's account of His work? "Blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in Me." Now, scandal means a stumbling-block, a hindrance, a cause of offence. Blessed, then, our Lord implies, blessed is he, and one of a special minority, to whom this message of peace and joy, this gospel of glad tidings to the men of goodwill, is not a startling, an appalling word. Blessed is he who receives, not as unwelcome news, a message heard, as it is by many, even as though they heard it not; heard, yet

* St. Luke iv. 18.

unheeded, because undesired and unloved; known of, but revolted from; entering into their ears, never into their hearts, and forming part of their consciousness, only to aggravate their guilt and their condemnation. Blessed is he who does not stumble on this corner-stone, and to whom the Cross, nay, the Crucified, does not prove a scandal.

Nor is this the only passage in Sacred Scripture that sets before us the same strange and terrible anomaly. The very first of our Blessed Lady's recorded woes, the beginning of those dolours that stand out as salient points in her life-long sorrow, is intimately allied with this dark truth. The maiden Mother brings her Divine Infant into the Temple. He is presented there to the Eternal Father, as the first-fruits of a world; "the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature;" and the prophecy is fulfilled, that in virtue of that, His Presence, of that Divine Shechinah in the Holy of Holies, the glory of the latter Temple should excel the glory of the former.* What a jubilant hour! You seem to hear the sons of men break forth into rejoicing—Hosanna to the Son of David, Who cometh in the Name of the Lord! "For a Child is born to us, and a Son is given to us, and the government is upon His shoulder. . . . His empire shall be multiplied, and of peace there shall be no end: He shall sit upon the throne of David . . . to establish it, and strengthen it with judgment and with justice from henceforth and for ever." "Many people shall go, and say: Come, and let us go up to the moun-

* Aggeus ii. 8—10; Mal. iii. 1.

tain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob: and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths."* Yet, at that very moment, when heaven and earth seem to meet, when justice and peace embrace, and the tabernacle of God is with men, and the yearning hopes of saints and prophets are fulfilled, "more abundantly than they could desire or understand," the Holy Ghost spoke through the lips of one who, in that temple, had long "waited for the consolation of Israel." The aged Simeon says, in effect: Blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in Him; blessed he who shall accept this Saviour, and not find in Him a subject of reproach. "Behold, this Child is set for the fall . . . of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be contradicted: and thy own soul a sword shall pierce."†

Again: what could have seemed more joyful or more hopeful than the promise, "Behold, I will lay a stone in the foundations of Sion, a tried stone, a corner-stone, a precious stone, founded in the foundation. He that believeth, let him not hasten."‡ A cheering hope, you would say, amid fluctuating human misbeliefs, and man's unaided theories or personal efforts, to have a foundation, tried and sure, to build on, to repose upon, and to cling to in "the overflowing scourge" of tempest, amid the danger of being cast away. Yet, what is the Apostle's commentary on this gracious truth? St. Paul summarizes the effect it produced on Israel: "They stumbled at the stumbling-stone. As it is written:

* Isaías ix. 6, 7; ii. 3.

† St. Luke ii. 34, 35.

‡ Isaías xxviii. 16.

Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling-stone, and a *Rock of scandal*.”* And St. Peter, after quoting the promise from the prophet, draws out the same contrast: “Unto Whom coming, as to a living stone, *rejected indeed by men*, but chosen and made honourable to God, be you also, as living stones, built up. . . . Wherefore it is said in the Scripture: Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious. . . . To you, therefore, that believe, He is honour; but to them that believe not, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is made the head of the corner; and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of scandal, to them who stumble at the word, neither do believe, whereunto also they are set.”†

What are these texts, and others that might be added, but expositions of a general law? It runs throughout God's dealings with His rational creatures, and contains the probation of man for eternity. Our Lord Himself has stated it in the words: “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required; and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more.”‡ In the exact proportion in which men have received light, knowledge of their Creator's will, grace and imparted strength to follow it, are they accountable for those gifts, and guilty by reason of their misuse. Thus our Lord “began to upbraid the cities wherein were done the most of His miracles, for that they had not done penance. Woe to thee, Corozain, woe to thee, Bethsaida: for if in Tyre and Sidon had been

* Rom. ix. 32, 33.

† 1 St. Peter ii. 4—8.

‡ St. Luke xii. 48.

wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, in the Day of Judgment, than for you.”*

Let us now see more distinctly the special stumbling-blocks, or causes of offence, presented by our Lord's teaching, and by reason of which the world will not receive it.

They may be stated as follows: the scandal of His condescension, of His bitter Passion, of His sanctity, and of His very truth. Of these, let us treat the two first.

1. “You know,” says St. Paul, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; that, being rich, He became poor for your sakes; that through His poverty you might be rich.”† This sends back our thoughts immediately to one of the especial tokens whereby our Lord proved His mission. “This,” said the Angel to the shepherds, on Christmas night, “this shall be a sign to you; you shall find the Infant wrapped in swathing-bands, and lying in a manger.” Strange sign, indeed, to a world that would only endure a Saviour after its own fashion. Men would have run after a Messiah born in a palace, and laid in a royal cradle. They would have grouped themselves round the standard of a conqueror, a second Josue or Gedeon, born in a camp and laid in a martial shield. But this is not the Child Who is set for the fall as well as resurrection of many in Israel. “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, and

* St. Matt. xi. 20—22.

† 2 Cor. viii. 9.

'no sign shall be given it," but the sign of the Infant Jesus, born in a stable, laid in a manger, obscure for thirty years at Nazareth, and only to be exalted on the Cross. Or, take His own words: "The poor," He declared to St. John's disciples, "have the Gospel preached to them," and preached to them by One Who for their sakes had become personally poor. He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and in habit found as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross."*

But this was a form of Saviour and a road to salvation, distasteful to the world. And so it was foretold of Him Who was, in truth, "beautiful above the sons of men," and "the Desired of all nations," that when He actually came, He should be unacknowledged. "He shall grow up . . . as a root out of a thirsty ground; there is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness; and we have seen Him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of Him; despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity; and His look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed Him not. Surely, He hath borne our infirmities, and carried our sorrows, and we have thought Him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God, and afflicted."† "He came to His own, and His own received Him not." The expectation raised among His disciples, that He was come to restore the kingdom to Israel, that He had seats

* Philipp. ii. 7, 8.

† Isaias liii. 2—4.

of honour to bestow on His right hand and on His left, that He would overthrow the throne of Cæsar and re-establish the throne of David, did but express the aspirations of the sensual heart of man. They who had followed His every footstep, still disputed among themselves which of them should be greatest in that fancied temporal reign. This only drew from Him a further exposition of the true spirit of His followers: "If any man desire to be first, he shall be the last of all, and the minister of all."* He defines the real purpose of His coming: "You know that the princes of the Gentiles lord it over them, and they that are the greater exercise power upon them. It shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be the greater among you, let him be your minister, and he that will be first among you shall be your servant; even as the Son of Man is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life, a redemption for many."†

Indeed, by this personal example of abasement and subjection, He has allured His disciples to humble and to submit themselves; He has for ever beautified and dignified obedience. It entered into the design of His work of redemption: "Who, in the days of His flesh, with a strong cry and tears, offering up prayers and supplications to Him that was able to save Him from death, was heard for His reverence; and, whereas indeed He was the Son of God, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered; and being consummated, He became, to all that obey Him, the cause of eternal salvation."‡

* St. Mark ix. 34.

† St. Matt. xx. 25—28.

‡ Heb. v. 7—9.

It entered into the divine plan by which He is set before us as our perfect Exemplar. "Which is greater, he that sitteth at table, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at table? But I am in the midst of you as he that serveth." "If I, being your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that, as I have done to you, so do you also. Amen, amen, I say to you: the servant is not greater than his lord, neither is the apostle greater than He that sent him. If you know these things, you shall be blessed if you do them."*

We can be at no loss to see how this, which was the very gospel of the poor in spirit, became a scandal to the world. The Heavenly Physician had come in the garb and human condition of the sufferers He was to heal. The last accents of the voice of prophecy had announced that—"Unto you that fear My Name, the Sun of Justice shall arise, and health in His wings."† As human nature had been deeply smitten with three deadly wounds, the Healer brought the remedy in His own incarnate life. His abasement was to heal man's pride; his poverty, man's love of possessing; His mortification, man's slavery to the senses. Therefore, by inevitable consequence, human nature rose in rebellion and rejection of its Healer. Like a frenzied patient, says St. Augustine, it started up in fury, it seized and slew the physician that would have restored it to health. His doctrine became an inevitable scandal; for by His word, and in His life, He preached subjection to God's

* St. John xiii. 14—17; St. Luke xxii. 27.

† Mal. iv. 2.

will. "Because the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be. And they who are in the flesh cannot please God. . . . Now, if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His."* He taught unquestioning obedience to every divine command. Was the teaching likely to be well received among the descendants of those who had fallen by giving ear to the first question ever asked on earth: "*Why* hath God commanded?"† He inspired His Blessed Mother, in the moment of the divine Maternity, to acquiesce without comprehending: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to Thy word." But the true children of Mary would be outnumbered, aye, and hated, by the genuine daughters of that mother who listened to the delusion: "Your eyes shall be opened; and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Thus, to whatever part we turn, of the teaching and example of our Divine Lord, of His Blessed Mother, as afterwards of His saints through all time, we find the obvious reason why that teaching and that example have formed an attraction to the children of grace, a repulsion for the children of the world. Simeon and Anna wait with longing eyes for the consolation of Israel; but when He is heard of, King Herod is troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. "A great multitude," that is, of the poorer sort, "heard Him gladly;" while the Pharisees could ask, with truth: "Hath any one of the rulers believed in Him, or of the Pharisees? But this multitude, that

* Rom. viii. 6—9.

† Gen. iii. 1.

knoweth not the law, are accursed."* It is as when the pillar of the cloud stood between the Egyptians and the camp of Israel : dark and threatening, or a cheer and a token of safety, as looked at by Pharaoh's host, or by the chosen tribes. So now, our Lord's character, His teaching, and His claims, are reported of with even so great variation. To the one side, He is light, and hope, and joy ; to the other, fear, repugnance, scandal. "Oh, that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, and wouldst come down !" † is an aspiration answered by the counter-wish : "Depart from us ; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." ‡

Nay, finally : except by miracle, there is a moral impossibility of His doctrine being received into a heart immersed in its worldly pride. "I am come in the Name of My Father, and you receive Me not ; if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive. *How can you believe*, who receive glory one from another, and the glory which is from God alone, you do not seek?" § Essential opposites cannot coalesce. "See your vocation, brethren, that [there are] not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble ; but the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the wise ; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that He may confound the strong ; and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and things that are not, that He might bring to nought things that are : that no flesh should glory in His sight." Until this

* St. Mark xii. 37 ; St. John vii. 48, 49. † Isaias lxiv. 1.

‡ Job xxi. 14.

§ St. John v. 43, 44.

principle is accepted, the faculty remains dormant by which our Lord's invitation can be heeded. "The sensual man perceiveth not those things that are of the Spirit of God ; for it is foolishness to him, and he *cannot* understand, because it is spiritually examined."* Well, therefore, might our Lord append this conclusion to the witness given alike by His miraculous and His moral workings among men : "Blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in Me."

2. What is true of our Lord's humiliations and obedience in general, is eminently true of His Sacred Passion. "Woe to this world," exclaims St. Hilary,† "woe to this world by reason of scandals. For this was the special ignorance in which men lay bound, that they would not receive the Lord of eternal glory under the abject appearance of His Cross. Yet, what could be a greater peril to the world, than not to receive Christ? And therefore did He declare that scandals must needs come; forasmuch as, to accomplish the hidden counsel of restoring to us eternal bliss, all the humiliations of the Passion were to be fulfilled in Himself." The Divine Passion was, indeed, the deepest of our Lord's humiliations, as it was the most transcendent act of His obedience. It is spoken of by St. Paul as the very climax, or rather, as the profound abyss, reached by His submission to the Eternal Father. We seem to descend, grade after grade, as the Apostle traces them for us, into a depth unfathomable. "Being in the form of God, [He] thought it not robbery to be

* 1 Cor. i. 26—29 ; ii. 14.

† St. Hilary. *in Matt.* xviii.

equal with God ; but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man, and in habit found as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross."* If, then, it was a scandal to the world that its long-expected Messiah should at length appear under a servile form, a poor man, the reputed son of a carpenter, Himself working at the trade, then gathering a few rude fishermen about Him, and teaching with a simplicity that a child might understand ; scorned by the Pharisees, believed in by none of the rulers ; accused of insanity, of intemperance, of rebellion ; how was that scandal afterwards intensified ! They saw Him taken by His enemies, on a charge of impotent unsuccessful rebellion against Cæsar, and overt blasphemy against the law ; forsaken by His unarmed followers ; dragged in succession before tribunals ecclesiastical and secular ; condemned by each in turn ; spit upon by slaves, bound with cords, blindfolded, buffeted ; His titles of Priest and King turned into rude and savage jests. They saw Him scourged by the Roman soldiery, blasphemed by the rabble, set aside to die, that a murderous robber might live. At length, after all the scenes of shame and agony which His Church lovingly commemorates in Good Friday lamentations, and the Stations of the Cross, His hands and feet are pierced, His bones are numbered : they stand staring and gazing on Him as He hangs between heaven and earth, as though both alike had rejected Him. If ever a cause seemed to have been lost, or

* Philipp. ii. 6, 8.

an attempt to have failed, it was here. What must the scandal of the Cross have been to those who only half believed, or were partly disposing themselves to hear Him further, when the very disciples going to Emmaus, who had accompanied His teaching and seen His miracles, now reasoned on His whole career as men with hopes disappointed! "We hoped that it was He Who should have redeemed Israel."* Until He re-established their faltering hopes, they seemed to have fallen from the blessedness of not being scandalised by His Cross. The Apostles, too; must we even say John, the virgin disciple, especially beloved? were for the moment gone. "His disciples, leaving Him, all fled away."† Even the destined Cephas, chosen for the future visible head of His Church, denied Him thrice, and needed a thrice-told penance to reinstate Him. Few, in that hour, had faith to "look, not at things seen, but at things unseen," and to discern, under that agonized form, in that reputed malefactor, the Eternal well-beloved Son, the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world.

This is what St. Paul again and again denotes as "the scandal of the Cross." "If," he says, "I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the scandal of the Cross made void."‡ Again: "The word of the Cross, to them indeed that perish, is foolishness; but to them that are saved—that is, to us—it is the power of God. . . . We preach Christ crucified; unto the Jews indeed a stumbling-block, and unto the Gentiles foolishness; but unto them

* St. Luke xxiv. 21. † St. Mark xiv. 50. ‡ Gal. v. 15.

that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* Against this very scandal our Lord gradually prepared His disciples. He had exercised towards them what He afterwards inspired His Church to practise towards the neophytes, or catechumens, in training for baptism. They were placed under a system of progressive teaching, a "discipline of the secret," in which, for the moment, no more was imparted than they were prepared at that moment to receive. The Cross was in great measure hidden from the minds of the twelve, as from catechumen or neophyte in the primitive catacombs. But when the hour of His Sacred Passion drew nigh, their faith being on the very eve of so severe a test, He then took them to Mount Tabor, and revealed to them His glory in the mystery of the Transfiguration. The three chosen disciples, Peter, James, and John, who were afterwards to witness His Agony in the darkness of Gethsemani, were with Him on the Mount, when His countenance shone as the sun, and His raiment became white and glittering as the light. Strengthened by this bright vision, and the presage it contained, they were now more able to bear what He had to say to them, and not be "scandalised in Him." "While all wondered at all the things He did, He said to His disciples: Lay you up in your hearts these words, for it shall come to pass that the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of

* 1 Cor. i. 18—25.

men;" "and they shall kill Him, and the third day He shall rise again. And they were troubled exceedingly." "They understood not this word, and it was hid from them, so that they perceived it not. And they were afraid to ask Him concerning this word."*

3. The Cross, then, is abhorrent to the mind of man, that shrinks from suffering, and is allured by pleasure. The Cross implies agony, fixity, resignation, death. The nails of the Crucifixion are as so many inexorable decrees, that in that place and way the victim shall be extended, transfixed, held fast; shall bleed, and writhe, and so expire. It was with no sense of the possibility of the thing, but simply in bitter scorn and triumphant hate, that, in that supreme hour of "scandal," His enemies cried aloud to Him on Calvary: "Vah, Thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three days dost rebuild it, save Thy own self: if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the Cross. . . . If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the Cross, and we will believe Him."† No opposites could be imagined more directly against each other, than His claim to be King, and this termination of His life.

Blessed, therefore, and gifted with no common faith, was the soul that remained unshaken, unscandalised, amid this seeming eclipse of the Sun of Justice. Such, pre-eminently, of course, and unapproachably, was the faith of the Mother most Dolorous, the Queen of Martyrs. She stood, that *mulier fortis*, by the Cross of the dread Sacrifice; she

* St. Luke ix. 44, 45; St. Matt. xvii. 21, 22.

† St. Matt. xxvii. 40, 42.

united her will with that of her Divine Son, and of the Eternal Father, in unwavering conformity, in faultless cooperation with the act whereby a world was being redeemed. Such, in their own degree, was the faith of the beloved disciple ; of the much-loving, therefore much-forgiven, Magdalene ; such was the heroic faith elicited by the good thief, of whom the words are true, as of none beside, that "being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled long times."* And so, from Calvary downward, through the centuries of the Church's life, and of the world's, the Cross has always been loved or hated, thrust aside or embraced, as men have accepted or rejected His teaching, in its personal vitality and power.

"The sensual man," says St. Paul, in words already quoted, "perceiveth not those things that are of the Spirit of God ; for it is foolishness to him, and he cannot understand, because it is spiritually examined. But the spiritual man judgeth all things."† What is this but saying, as our Lord declares, that the things which are high in the esteem of men, are abomination, and nothing short of it, in the eyes of God ? Conversely, then, what is high in the esteem of God is abomination with men who are aliens from the Spirit of God. The test and measure of them is spiritual : how can you suppose it to be apprehended, or so much as seen, by those who are carnal ? As soon could the eye of flesh, in this mortal state, see the invisible realities ; as soon could the soul, unenlightened by faith, accept supernatural truth, as the sensual man have a perception of the glory of the

* Wisdom iv. 13.

† 1 Cor. ii. 15.

Cross, and not be repelled by its shadow and its scandal. He lacks the sense that would give him any true view of it; for he walks by sight, not by faith. When he sees it, which is as seldom as possible, but when it is brought inevitably before him, that "sign of the Son of Man" is as the handwriting on the wall to the eyes of Baltassar. He beholds it, and his "countenance is changed, and his thoughts trouble him."* Unhappily for himself, and unlike the King of Babylon, he is able to turn away from the sight, and he does so with all speed. It becomes to him, as to the pagan of old Rome, a gibbet of infamy, the moment you plead with him, by its motives, for any real observance or act of self-denial. The child of this world is, indeed, ready indolently to accept the Cross as an historical fact, as he accepts the lifting up the brazen serpent in the wilderness. He would indolently and complacently receive salvation from Him Who hung upon it, so long as that Saviour were content to make no demand upon him, and no appeal.

This, in fact, is the popular religion of the day: an apocryphal gospel of man's devising, which found its appropriate preacher in an apostate monk and arch-rebel; a religion whose ultimate maxim is the *pecca fortiter*, from which well-meaning souls are only preserved by the inconsistency of a conscience more Christian than their theory. To gaze with passive acceptance on a work supposed to be done for us, without any active concurrence of our own, instead of "working out our salvation with fear and

* Dan. v. 6.

trembling,"* is flattering enough to man's natural indolence and sensuality. But to advance from the Crucifixion of God to the consequent crucifixion of self, is to convert an interesting generality into a prompt inexorable demand. It is the scandal of the Cross; it comes to man as an invitation, alike, and which precept, he has neither heart nor intention to obey. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; for he that shall lose his life, for My sake, shall save it."† Up to that point, the man of taste and sentiment can perceive, in some sort, the beauty of the Divine Passion. It is a Crucifixion, by one of the old masters, and in his best manner; disposition of the figures admirable; the light, *chiaro oscuro*, beautifully thrown. It never enters into his head that the subject has any personal claim on his own conduct of life. Sacred art, to him, is like sacred music, or eloquent discourse; or like the Prophet's word to the unbelieving Jews; received as an æsthetic intellectual enjoyment. "My people sit before thee, and hear thy words, and do them not: for they turn them into a song of their mouth, and their heart goeth after their covetousness. And thou art to them as a musical song, which is sung with a sweet and agreeable voice; and they hear thy words, and do them not."‡ "If a man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he shall be compared to a man beholding his natural countenance in a glass. For he beheld himself, and went

* Phil. ii. 12. † St. Luke ix. 23, 24. ‡ Ezech. xxxiii. 31, 32.

his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was."*

4. But look now at the opposite state of soul. Let us enter into the views and perceptions of those who realize that "all who live piously in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;" that "we must through many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God."† They whom our Lord has inspired with the desire to be like Himself, accept, as their portion, this necessity of suffering at the hands of the world. They have chosen their side, in a war between antagonist powers. They know the mutual opposition is interminable, or terminable only with the end of earth and time. Accordingly, they listen with joy to the Apostle, when he says to them: "Most dearest, think not strange the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you: but rejoice, being partakers of the sufferings of Christ; that when His glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you be reproached for the name of Christ, you shall be happy: for that which is of the honour, glory, and power of God, and that which is His Spirit, resteth upon you."‡ This primary truth, that to be on God's side is to be an alien and a foreigner to the world that is His enemy, has armed martyrs and confessors in all ages meekly to oppose themselves alike to its flatteries and its frowns. The thought has nerved them, strengthened them, to suffer, not with mere constancy, but with joy, the extremity of persecution, moral or physical, or both

* St. James i. 23, 24.

† 2 Tim. iii. 12; Acts xiv. 21.

‡ 1 St. Peter iv. 12—14.

combined. For they have rested their hopes on that "faithful saying, . . . If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him : if we deny Him, He also will deny us."*

This mingled hope and fear, this word of promise alike and warning, has raised their spirits to a high-toned yet calm antagonism to whatever opposed their Lord. "Much peace have they that love Thy law : and to them there is no stumbling-block"†—*non est illis scandalum*. If their carrying the Cross is a scandal to the world, it is no surprise to themselves. They have but to remember the engagements of their baptism : they have but to look around them, and see that the world of to-day has not falsified its old character. It is still the same great enemy of God, and, by consequence, of all who are "led by the Spirit of God." The same chief motive powers are at work in it : "the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life." These denote its character and urge its acts, now, even as under Nero, and Julian, and Dioclesian ; in this age of civilization, as in the rudest and darkest times. They must be opposed by the hardness, the self-abnegation, poverty, and lowliness of the Spirit of Him Who has "overcome the world."‡ Between these opposing forces there is neither truce nor neutral ground. Each is necessarily a scandal to the other. "These things have I spoken to you, that you may not be scandalised. They will put you out of the synagogues : yea, the hour cometh, that whosoever killeth you, will think that

* 2 Tim. ii. 11, 12. † Psalm cxviii. 165.

‡ St. John xvi. 33.

he doth a service to God. And these things will they do to you, because they have not known the Father, nor Me. . . . If the world hate you, know ye that it hated Me before you. If you had been of the world, the world would love its own : but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.* Even the Prince of the Apostles is rebuked, with a word unusually stern, as a "Satan," or adversary,† when he seems to propose a truce, a mere cessation of arms, between those two standards. For "he that is not with Me, is against Me ; and he that gathered not with Me, scattereth." A moment before, the word was : "Blessed art thou, Simon, son of John, because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father, Who is in heaven." But when, with an emotion of pity for his Lord's sufferings, he descends, as it were, from the supernatural, and would persuade Him to spare Himself, he suddenly meets the rebuke : "Thou art *a scandal* unto Me : because thou dost not relish the things that are of God, but the things that are of men." So utterly impossible is it to serve two masters, to compromise between two principles, to love the world and the world's Divine Antagonist, or to have all men speak well of us, as their fathers did of the false prophets, and to share nevertheless in the blessedness of not being scandalised in Truth Incarnate.

May such thoughts do their work in our souls during Advent. May they settle down into a firm resolution to carry out fully, by aid of His grace, the

* St. John xvi. 1—3 ; xv. 18, 19. † St. Matt. xvi. 23.

engagements we have taken to the Captain of our salvation. "Fight the good fight of faith," exhorts the Apostle: "lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art called, and hast confessed a good confession before many witnesses."* An unspeakable rejoicing, or an utter confusion, lie in store for mankind, when the great last Advent shall have come. The right hand of the Judge, or the left, will be assigned to such as have here been for Him, or against Him; who have gloried in His Cross, or been scandalised by it. "Many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some unto life everlasting, and others unto reproach, to see it always."† "Who-soever shall glorify Me, him will I glorify: but they that despise Me, shall be despised." "He will keep the feet of His saints: and the wicked shall be silent in darkness."‡ "Then shall the just stand with great constancy against those that have afflicted them. . . . These, seeing it, shall be troubled with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the suddenness of their unexpected salvation; saying within themselves, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit: These are they, whom we had some time in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints!"§

Then shall be revealed the wisdom, the everlasting glory, of those whom the world had cast out and trodden down, as belonging to the "Despised and

* 1 Tim. vi. 12.

† Dan. xii. 2.

‡ 1 Kings ii. 30, 9.

§ Wisdom v. 1—5.

the most Abject of men." Then will be the final changing of places, the reversal of the present order of things, when the first shall be last, and the last first. "And the moon shall blush, and the sun shall be ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in Mount Sion, and in Jerusalem, and shall be glorified in the sight of His ancients." * "To him that shall overcome, I will grant to sit with Me in My throne, as I also have overcome, and have sat with My Father in His throne." † "Hear Me, O ye hard-hearted, who are far from justice. I have brought My justice near: it shall not be far off: and My salvation shall not tarry. I will give salvation in Sion, and My glory in Israel." ‡ "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me, and of My words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed of him, when He shall come in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." § "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall upon us: and to the hills: Cover us." || "Fall upon us, and hide us from the Face of Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." ¶ "Blessed is he," and he shall then be revealed as blessed, before men and angels, before the reprobate that are withering away for fear, before the saints who welcome him into their happy company, "Blessed is he that shall not be scandalised in Me."

"Wherefore, having the loins of your mind girt up, being sober, trust perfectly in the grace which

* Isaias xxiv. 23.

† Apoc. iii. 21.

‡ Isaias xlv. 11, 12.

§ St. Mark viii. 38.

|| St. Luke xxiii. 30.

¶ Apoc. vi. 16.

is offered you in the revelation of Jesus Christ, as children of obedience."* "For yet a little while, and He that is to come, will come, and will not delay. But My just one liveth by faith : but if he withdraw himself, he shall not please My soul. But we are not the children of withdrawing unto perdition, but of faith to the saying of the soul.'†

* 1 St. Peter i. 13, 14.

† Heb. x. 37—39.

SERMON XX.

THE WORD OF GOD, HEARD OR REJECTED BY MEN.

ST. JOHN viii. 47.

Qui ex Deo est, verba Dei audit. Propterea vos non auditis: quia ex Deo non estis.

He that is of God, heareth the words of God. You, therefore, hear them not, because you are not of God.

THE great moralist of the pagan world discusses, as a vital element of his treatise on ethics, the qualities of the hearer whom it shall address. The hearer must be a man of a certain good disposition,* if he is to hear so as to heed. To some extent, he must be earnest and teachable. If it is too much to require of him that he should at once yearn with a desire for moral truth, at least he must be open to its reception. Until he has tested by experience the value of the principles and rules laid down by the teacher, they must be taken on trust. Acceptance and belief is to be his part, without at first inquiring into the reasons of what he hears. Otherwise, the clearest demonstration will fail to convince him, or at least to affect his conduct of life. He will remain an unprofitable hearer; he will cavil and rebel against

* Arist. *Ethics* I. ii. 6, 7.

the teaching. Soon he will cease to be so much as an outward disciple, and will turn to some object of thought more engaging to his undisciplined self. Moral training, or at least moral predisposition, are as much required for the acceptance of moral instruction, as the faculty of analysis or consecutive thought for any process of pure reason.

So far even the pagan mind could see. While physical science lays no weightier claim on its disciple than that of sufficient ability and a grave attention, the ethical science of life demands, even primarily, a *wish* to receive and to improve by the reception of truth. It supposes its disciple to be conscious of his interior need for principles it has in store for him, and anxious to rise by them above his present level. He must recognize in himself that forlorn and outcast state of soul which the Apostle represents as the cry of the pagan heart: "Unhappy man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" * He is the self-accused weakling of the heathen poet: "I see the best, and yet the worse pursue." And this sense of need, this "expectation of the creature," "made subject to vanity," yet "not willingly," and yearning to be "delivered from the servitude of corruption," is a condition demanded, at least in adult life, for profitably receiving every truth of the moral order.

Advancing now from the sphere of nature to that of grace, we find the same principle at work. The word of life, to accept and to obey which is salvation, must be received, as our Lord declares,†

* Rom. vii. 24.

† St. Luke viii. 15.

into "a good heart." No other heart is typified by the good soil, where that life-giving seed fructifies when it falls on it. It is the "men of goodwill" to whom the Gospel is a message of peace on earth. This, indeed, makes up the solemnity of that parable, where, of four kinds of soil, only one produces fruit. Such is the teaching of numerous other passages in the Sacred Scriptures. "The word of hearing," says St. Paul, speaking of the Jews, "did not profit them, not being mixed with faith of those things they heard." * Yet how abundantly had the seed been sown among them! For three years our Lord, the Prophet and Legislator Incarnate, had "come in and gone out among" † His ancient people, drawing crowds around Him. "All gave testimony to Him, and they wondered at the words of grace that proceeded from His mouth." ‡ His enemies were forced to own, with a kind of despairing bitterness: "Behold, the whole world is gone after Him." § And yet, of all those multitudes who thronged His footsteps, witnessed His miracles, and were themselves the subjects of His gracious acts as well as hearers of His persuasive words, how many were the disposed hearts whom that revelation brought to everlasting life?

So, before His coming, "the redemption of Israel" had been proclaimed by type and prophecy. Isaias, well named the "fifth Evangelist," described the Redeemer as though he had seen Him. He spoke, with a vividness that would seem irresistible, of his Lord's coming, His birth, His teaching, His grace,

* Heb. iv. 22.

† Acts i. 21.

‡ St. Luke iv. 22.

§ St. John xii. 19.

His miracles of mercy, His redemption of His people, His Passion, His sacrifice, His personal triumph, and that which He should bestow on His own. Yet, of all to whom such promises were familiar, "being read in the synagogue every Sabbath," we only find Simeon and Anna, and their few acquaintances, who "waited for the consolation of Israel." That the Messias should be born in Bethlehem of Judah, was well known by "all the chief priests, and the scribes of the people,"* consulted by Herod in his fear. Yet, when the Wise Men, who had heard no word more recent than the ancient prediction of Balaam,† came their long journey under the dumb guidance of a star, and went down from those halls of learning where prophecy was so well expounded, to the lowly stable where it was fulfilled, they were accompanied by no one among their own instructors. The last were first, and the first last. "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into exterior darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."‡ Again, the prophecy of the Passion of the Lamb of God, so touching, awakening such lively interest and inquiry, was known to the Pharisees and doctors of the law; yet only the Æthiopian, sitting alone in his chariot, and employing his very time of travel in earnest search for truth, inquires to whom the solemn words may belong.

* St. Matt. ii. 4.

† Numbers xxiv. 17.

* St. Matt. viii. 11, 12.

What alarming indications are these, of what our Lord announces in all its breadth: "Many are called, but few are chosen." To many are the words urgently addressed: "O all you that pass by the way: behold and see!" and they still pass by, as though nothing were to be seen. "All the day long have I spread My hands to a people that believeth not, and contradicteth Me:"* a divine expostulation, true under the old law, but deriving its intenser, more definite meaning, from the history of the crucifixion, and the arresting symbol of the crucifix. Once more: "Wisdom preacheth abroad, she uttereth her voice in the streets; at the head of multitudes she crieth out, in the entrance of the gates of the city she uttereth her words, saying: "O children, how long will you love childishness, and fools covet those things which are hurtful to themselves, and the unwise hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof: behold, I will utter my spirit to you, and will show you my words."† Can there be a proclamation more universal? An invitation, announcement, or law, would be considered by the common sense of men to be promulgated beyond cavil, if cried with this publicity. Yet what result attends the gracious message? We are told in the next verse: "Because I called, and you refused; I stretched out My hand, and there was none that regarded: you have despised all My counsel, and have neglected My reprehensions: I also will laugh in your destruction. . . Then shall they call upon Me, and I will not hear: they shall rise in the

* Rom. x. 21.

† Prov. i. 20—23.

morning, and shall not find Me : because they have hated instruction, and received not the fear of the Lord, nor consented to My counsel, but despised all My reproof."

Passing down the stream of time, from the inspired writers of holy songs and parables of wisdom, to more definite prophecy, the story is still the same. It is God Who calls, it is man who refuses to hear. "Hear, ye deaf," cries the Prophet Isaias, "and ye blind, behold, that you may see."* And he then proceeds in his appeal to men who were open-eyed, and quick of ear, intelligent, interested, so long as truth laid no personal claim on them : men who then only grew dull, when they should be most awake and eager. "Thou that seest many things, wilt thou not observe them? thou that hast ears open, wilt thou not hear? . . . Who is there among you, that will give ear to this? that will attend and hearken for times to come?"†

Jeremias, again, prophesied before rebellious Israel, full forty years : and they cast him first into prison, then put him to death. Imprisoned, and unable to announce the word of the Lord by his own mouth to Joakim and the lords of his court, he writes it in a book, by direct inspiration, and sends it to him by Baruch. What results? "The King sat in the winter-house, in the ninth month : and there was a hearth before him, full of burning coals. And when Judi had read three or four pages, he cut it with the penknife, and he cast it into the fire that was upon the hearth, till all the volume

* Isaias xlii. 18.

† *Ibid.* 20, 23.

was consumed with the fire that was upon the hearth. And the King and all his servants that heard all these words were not afraid, nor did they rend their garments."*

The meekness of Jeremias fails. That type of the Man of Sorrows, with his gentle endurance, and persistent warning, does but exasperate a hardened people. Then Ezechiël, with voice of a sterner tone, arises to deliver the message; with equal fidelity and, in a human sense, with equal failure. He concludes one dread portion of his prophecy with words, referred to by our Divine Lord on His way to Calvary; they speak, in terms which thrill us as we read them, of the punishments of God's enemies in time and in eternity. "Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, and will burn in thee every green tree and every dry tree: the flame of the fire shall not be quenched; and every face shall be burned in it, from the south even to the north. And all flesh shall see that I the Lord have kindled it, and it shall not be quenched."† Here at last, one would think, was an arresting message. It will subdue them into some seriousness; or, short even of this, will awaken some curiosity. They will inquire, like the Athenians, if they do no more: "May we know what this is which thou speakest of? For thou bringest certain new things to our ears. We would know, therefore, what these things mean."‡ Alas, with what sadness, with what feeling of the hopelessly hardened hearts of his countrymen, does the Prophet record the answer

* Jer. xxxvi. 22—24.

† Ezech. xx. 47, 48.

‡ Acts xvii. 19, 20.

they made, when he had opened before them the very pit of reprobation, and shown them its flames. "And I said: Ah, ah, ah, O Lord God: they say of me: Doth not this man speak by parables?"*

So, when Lot spoke to his sons-in-law, and reported to them the warning of the angels who held commission to destroy the wicked place, "he seemed to them to speak as it were in jest."† So, in every age, in states of society also that call themselves Christian, as among dark pagans and hardened Jews, God's appointed messengers, and His servants who give ear to them, have been considered as dreamers, visionary, and extravagant. All are "babblers" and theorists, who steadfastly fix their own eyes, and endeavour to guide the eyes of others, to the great momentous realities of eternity. The rich man in the parable had known enough to be saved by it. He was lost: but, in his place of torments, he believed it impossible that the credible report of what his selfish life had brought him to, should fail of arousing the five brethren he had left on earth. Lazarus actually present before them, a messenger from the other world, must needs, he thought, arrest men who had remained deaf to the warnings of departed prophets. Yet we know the answer of the Divine Teacher, by the medium of His parable: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe if one rise again from the dead."‡

However dark and fearful this human indifference to the voice of God, can it be unintelligible? How,

* Ezech. xx. 49.

† Gen. xix. 14.

‡ St. Luke xvi. 31.

indeed, should the case be otherwise? How should a message, a call, so supernatural, and so counter to the indifference, the indolence, the sensuality of our poor nature, fall on the ears of the multitude with a welcome sound? True, it is a blessed message of deliverance to such as groan in their prison-house, with earnest, efficacious desire to be freed, at any cost, from the servitude of corruption. "How beautiful," exclaims the Prophet, seeing afar off the grace and truth that were to come by Jesus Christ, "how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, and that preacheth peace; of him that showeth forth good, that preacheth salvation, that saith to Sion: Thy God shall reign!"* But this is a beauty requiring some education of soul to perceive. An education within reach, indeed, of the poorest and most simple; nay, their special privilege and inheritance; an education of soul and of heart, not of the intelligence alone. For "His communication is with the simple;"† and "the poor have the Gospel preached to them."‡ But so, to use a meagre illustration, the attractiveness of high art, the harmony of intricate and cultivated music, may appear cold and lifeless, by comparison, to eyes and ears untrained, unchastened, that are caught by what is more obvious, broadly coloured, and strongly pronounced. Yet art, even the purest, harmony the most refined, can be apprehended and loved by simple minds, in virtue of the very simplicity that preserves them from vicious perversion of taste. And thus, in the higher range of spiritual attraction, the gospel

* Isaias lii. 7. † Prov. iii. 32. ‡ St. Matt. xi. 5.

feast, the marriage supper of the great King, with all its richness and princely condescension, is attended chiefly from the streets and lanes of the city, from the highways and hedges, by "the poor, and the feeble, and the blind, and the lame." * It finds no room in ears that are filled with other sounds, more familiar and better loved; the lowing of the oxen from the farm, the voice of domestic affection from the hearth. "Wisdom hath built herself a house, she hath hewn her out seven pillars. She hath slain her victims, mingled her wine, and set forth her table. She hath sent her maids to invite to the tower, and to the walls of the city: Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me. And to the unwise she said: Come, eat my bread, and drink the wine which I have mingled for you." † For eighteen hundred years—not to speak of the preambles and forerunners delivering portions of the message—the voice of that Wisdom, Incarnate and articulate, has invited the passing crowds. If you stood in the porch of that banquet-hall of wisdom, you might watch and see how many of the invited, each in turn, makes his excuse, as he hurries by. Do not, he pleads, detain him just now with importunity; he goes to secure his place at the banquet of Assuerus, or of Baltassar.

Our Lord stands, surrounded by the multitudes, whom He had just fed by a miracle of mercy. He takes occasion from this to draw their minds upward to the supernatural heights of His heavenly teaching. He announces to them a transcendent

* St. Luke xiv. 21—23.

† Prov. ix. 1—5.

exertion of grace and love, that shall be set in motion, and thenceforth perpetuated, to feed their souls. Gradually, and with exceeding gentleness, yet with progressive advance from point to point, conclusively and (so to say) inexorably, he announces to them the banquet in store for their acceptance. Inexorably; because their whole probation lies in this. To accept His word, is to secure their acceptance in turn : to reject it, is to pronounce their own rejection. The manna in the desert shall be surpassed by the true bread from heaven, which the Father shall give them. "The bread of God is that which cometh down from heaven and giveth life to the world."* He Himself, Who had come down, is the Bread of life. "I am the living Bread, which came down from heaven. . . I am the Bread of Life . . . that if any one eat of It, he may not die . . . and the Bread which I will give is My Flesh, for the life of the world. . . Amen, amen, I say unto you : unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, abideth in Me, and I in him." And lastly, as though to rivet, in a sense, and to crown, all the previous stages of this wonderful doctrine by one analogy or comparison, which nothing could surpass, and beyond which nothing remained to be taught : "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by

* St. John vi. 33.

the Father, so he that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me.”*

Now, let us observe the double action of this divine teaching, according to the preparation of heart brought to it by the hearers. Our Lord advances further and further, leading them from the first simple statement that spiritual doctrine was better than earthly food, until He arrives at the highest point, and sets before them the Eucharistic, sacramental communication of Himself. But as He goes on, and is accompanied by faithful and thankful acceptance from hearts set in order, or disposed to eternal life,† others are repelled from Him in the same proportion. The more He teaches, the more do they cavil and murmur. They seem to invite Him to explain away His words, to take off something from their trenchant precision, to allow them to be accepted in a figurative or spiritual sense, as so many insist on receiving them now. When He does none of these things, but on the contrary, renders them more and more definite and unmistakable; when He brings it to a point, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear to listen, then the term of their probation seems to be reached. “After this,” says the sacred narrative, “many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him.” Strange perversity, or rather, want of heart: that what was in itself so attractive and subduing should have been to them a stumbling-stone of scandal! But let us turn to the other side, even as our Lord did; sorrowfully, we must suppose, at

* St. John vi. 35—58.

† See Acts xiii. 48, and Corn. à Lapidè on that passage.

the multitude who thus rejected Him, and "judged themselves unworthy of eternal life."* "Then Jesus said to the twelve: Will you also go away? And Simon Peter answered Him: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

It is more than time to see with what distinctness of teaching this bears on our Blessed Lord's words, with which we began.

I. In the text, then, we have a striking axiom, to denote the two states in which all men are living; that of attention to Almighty God or neglect of Him, in the words He has addressed to them. He said it, in other terms, but quite as distinctively, a little later on. "The sheep hear his (the shepherd's) voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. . . He goeth before them; and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. But a stranger they follow not, but fly from him, because they know not the voice of strangers. This proverb Jesus spoke to them. But they understood not what He spoke to them. Jesus therefore said to them again, . . I am the Good Shepherd; and I know Mine, and Mine know Me. . . But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice; and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give them life everlasting, and no man shall pluck them out of My hand."† Here, as in the text, two classes of persons are brought out into sharp contrast. One class hears the voice of the Lord, as obedient sheep hear the voice of their shepherd: and hearing Him they follow Him. They are known of Him, and they

* Acts xiii. 46.

† St. John x. 3—28.

know Him. When His voice sounds, they recognize it : and they distinguish between His and the voice of strangers, which inspires them not with confidence, but with mistrust and fear. They not only know His voice, but love it ; for it is to them a token of His love ; it is their guidance to salvation. They respond to the invitations of His grace, to His every call and precept ; “ Show me Thy face ; let Thy voice sound in my ears : for Thy voice is sweet, and Thy face comely.”* They endeavour to consecrate their hearts into an interior shrine—a *sanctum*, as the world speaks of profaner things—within which they retreat, when possible to them, in definite times of prayer, in the little uncounted moments of the day, when no other employment can lawfully claim them. In that tabernacle there, they seek “ the secret of His face,”† they listen to the living oracles of His communication that proceed, as it were, from between the cherubim, yet all within the silent chambers of their own hearts, from which the world has been shut out. “ I will hear what the Lord God will *speak in me* ; for He will speak peace unto His people, and unto His saints, and unto them that are converted to the heart.”‡

On the opposite side stand those who are deaf or heedless when God speaks. Having eyes, they see not, having ears, they hear not, and having hearts, they do not understand. Their attention is fixed on other objects, on things that interest them more deeply. The voice of the Good Shepherd is an intrusion, every announcement of His will is irksome ; nay, the

* Cant. ii. 14.

† Psalm xxx. 21.

‡ Psalm lxxxiv. 9.

very pleadings of His love, unloved. It is true, they refuse to listen in various gradations of obstinacy. Some among them are described by the Patriarch Job as even saying to God, "Depart from us; we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways."* Others, more respectful than this, simply delay, and put off the message of their Creator with pretexts: *semper victuri*, professing themselves ready to listen the next time. "Command, command again; expect, expect again."† The summons to begin and live for the end to which He created them, is as unwelcome as the early call to the sluggard, to begin the new day: they are fain to persuade themselves that nothing presses, and that yet there is time.

A third class is of such as resemble the Prophet Balaam, that most instructive character; who, amid his wickedness, describes himself as "the hearer of the words of God, he that hath beheld the vision of the Almighty."‡ Like him, they have a distinct knowledge of the divine will, or so much of it as would suffice to lead them on to the complete revelation, the perfect day. Like him, they hear God's words, as hearing them not; hear them, that is, in a speculative way, that leads to no practice. The divine message is to them an interesting subject for the intellect to work upon; in its turn, of course, with other speculations of equal or greater interest. They discuss theological questions at their club, as the volatile Athenians crowded the Areopagus to hear St. Paul. "He seemeth to be a

* Job xxi. 14.

† Isaias xxviii. 10—13.

‡ Numbers xxiv. 4.

publisher of new gods,"* was enough to rouse the attention of those newsmongers, sated with the more frivolous topics that made up their lives. For the moment, they were as serious in inquiry as the heathen emperor when he published a reward for the man who should invent a new pleasure. Such are men without real earnestness, amid all the active play of intellect that distinguishes them. They take it to be a graceful condescension to listen awhile to the truth; as the lordly master of an entertainment bestows a momentary attention on each of his guests in turn, keeps the conversation going, shows his own versatile urbanity, and entertains some grave and infrequent visitor equally with his more familiar associates.

Thus, in several degrees, of open rebellion, or passive neglect, men set themselves against the voice that still pleads, still warns, still urges, still promises—and will hereafter judge them, when it shall plead no longer.

We need not travel far, to find these two contrary dispositions of soul exhibited. When is a mission given in any populous town, but then and there you have the scoffer and reviler, or the sluggishly indifferent, in contrast with the earnest listener? They live in the same street; they are separated by a partition wall, or found in one family circle. There are "five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. . . The father against the son, and

* Acts xvii. 18. *Ibid.* v. 21. "Now all the Athenians, and strangers that were there, employed themselves in nothing else but either in telling or in hearing something new."

the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”* It is the parable of the sower impersonated. The wayside, the stony ground, the thorns, lie together in a narrow seed-plot covered by one roof. What is the result for eternity? They who have heard, and heeded, are gathered safely into God’s garner. They who have refused to hear, “like the deaf adder, that stoppeth her ears,” or “hearing, have not heard,” are bound in bundles for the burning.

Or, take another case. The claims of the Church of God lie equally before men’s individual minds. Her authority to teach, the grace of her sacraments, the consequent necessity of submission, and of admission into her fold, are truths proposed for their acceptance; and their eternity lies in the balance of accepting or rejecting. One of them is Nathaniel, brought up, it may be, with strong prejudices against the truth; fully under their influence when that truth is first proposed to him. “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” is his first question. Under the form of a question, it contains a strenuous confident denial. But, while he questions, he does not turn away: or, if he turns away, he is still open to the pleading of conviction, to win him back. This is the “Come, and see,” of the Gospel. He comes, he sees, and is converted. Why? Because there are no obstinate barriers to be thrown down; there is only, as it were, a window to be unbarred, to admit the

* St. Luke xii. 52, 53.

light. Are many Nathaniels found in Israel ; men "without guile," with no moral distortion to bar out the access of truth? Saul the persecutor, in the days of his blindness, erred rather as to means, than as to the end. He truly desired to do the will of the God of Israel ; and truly thought, no doubt, that he should inherit the blessing formerly pronounced upon Phinees the priest, for an equal zeal. It is his record of himself when afterwards raised to the apostolate, and answering for his belief in our Lord: "I, indeed, did formerly think that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth: which also I did at Jerusalem, and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, . . and when they were put to death, I brought the sentence."* In all this, there is intense active opposition. What can be more determined? It never wanders across his mind that the Christian faith is anything but a superstition opposed to Divine truth. "Can any good thing come from the Nazarene?" might be his question, even like that of Nathaniel. Yet, in the sight of that Lord, Who was so soon to call him, what predispositions to good were manifest ; what remote preparation to answer to that call! He is one of the lost sheep of the house of Israel: he has not yet heard the voice of the Good Shepherd. But he is one of whom our Lord had said: "Other sheep I have, that are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice."† He hears it, and wondering asks: "Who art Thou, Lord?" Assured that the crucified Jesus is the glorified Head of His Church, his instant response shows what had

* Acts xxvi. 9, 10.

† St. John x. 16.

been the under-current of his soul : " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? "

Now, this history of Saul is in a measure reproduced daily. In a measure ; for we cannot often suppose a zeal so honest, or an ignorance so complete. Men in general act from mixed motives, even when they deem themselves most simple-hearted ; they fail in correspondence with the grace of half-illuminations, and thus live and die, without having seen the light. But it is true, no less, that many a man's heart lies like a sealed fountain, dark and unsunned, by reason of superincumbent soil. A prejudice of education, remoteness from means of knowledge or inquiry, some peculiar turn of thought, some seeming accident, has diverted the entrance of truth into his soul. It needs a touch of sorrow, an arrest of the hand of Providence, a dangerous sickness, or keen humiliation ; something to shake, to upheave, to loosen ; something to bring the tidings before him ; the word of a friend, as to Nathaniel, a stroke of manifest irresistible conviction from Himself, as to Saul : and he hears the " unknown God " Whom he ignorantly worshipped, calling him by his name, while He announces His own. " I am Jesus, Whom thou persecutest. It is hard for thee to kick against the goad. "

But, if this future, we may hope, is yet in store for some " men of goodwill, " darkened though they may be at present, and actively opposed to God's plan of dealing, what of those who own no predispositions to receive it when declared ? We read of the conversion of Saul, who was " breathing out threaten-

ings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord." We do not read of the conversion of Gallio, who "cared for none of those things." How completely the character of such a man, so far as we gather it from a brief notice, is that of the world's children in all times; in our nineteenth age of the earth's decay, even as when Cæsar ruled. Heedless of warning from without, self-centred, self-satisfied, their main desire is to let life go by pleasantly: they only mourn, with the pagan poet, that its passage is so swift. "They have not His words," says St. Cyril; "not that they have forgotten the Gospel preached to them, but that, caught by the allurements of pleasure, they reject the grace of the Spirit."* Yet, in one sense they have truly forgotten; for so St. James describes him who is a hearer only, not a doer, of the word. "He shall be compared to a man beholding his own countenance in a glass. For he beheld himself, and went his way, and presently forgot what manner of man he was."† The light against which they sin, is withdrawn again; warnings soon cease to plead when they are neglected. The whisper of our guardian angels is soft and low; distinct enough to all who have ears to hear, but easily overpowered by the ruder sounds of earth and the beatings of a selfish heart.

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." The heathen axiom may be more openly avowed in this plain form, or more covertly implied; but in every selfish life it is the real and ruling principle. Live,

* St. Cyril. Alex. l. 10, c. 14. *in Johann.*

† St. James i. 23, 24.

while you may, and enjoy life while you can. Hence, men are impatient at any intrusion of the eternal world, with its realities and its claims; it comes like the skeleton at the banquet. It is the dead fly in the ointment of their delights; * an unsavoury presence in the midst of its sweet odour. "A people that provoketh to wrath, and lying children, children that will not hear the law of God; who say to the seers: See not; and to them that behold: Behold not for us those things that are right; speak unto us pleasant things, see errors for us; . . let the Holy One of Israel cease from before us." † They desire nothing more than to be left alone. But truth is the urgent thing that will not leave them alone: and they hate it accordingly; with an intensity like the hatred of Achab for Micheas the prophet of truth. ‡ Conscience, however stifled, will at times make itself heard, as "a word spoken in private," while their "ears by stealth, as it were, receive the veins of its whisper, in the horror of a vision by night, when deep sleep is wont to hold men." § If they would honestly speak out, and tell the condition of soul which by times is theirs, it would run still in the inspired words: "Fear seized upon me, and trembling, and all my bones were affrighted: and when a spirit passed before me, the hair of my flesh stood up. There stood one whose countenance I knew not, an image before my eyes, and I heard the voice as it were of a gentle wind: . . because no one understandeth, they shall perish for ever." ||

* Eccles. x. 1. † Isaias xxx. 9—11. ‡ 3 Kings xxii. 8.

§ Job iv. 12, 13. || Job v. 14—21.

Such is the occasional disturbance that visits the heedless man of the world, when danger or death comes to shake the curtains of his self-confident repose: when the emptiness of all he has followed, turns his very soul sick within him, for disappointment. Meanwhile, his normal condition is one of simple insensibility to that voice at which demons tremble, and the just look up and lift their heads. "For the Lord hath mingled for you the spirit of a deep sleep; He will shut up your eyes. He will cover your prophets and princes, that see visions. And the vision of all shall be unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which when they shall deliver to one that is learned, they shall say: Read this, and he shall answer: I cannot, for it is sealed. And the book shall be given to one that knoweth no letters, and it shall be said to him: Read; and he shall answer: I know no letters."* How should they know letters, that have never learned? How should they catch the language of heaven, or so much as understand the grammar of it, who have never frequented its court nor followed the warfare of its camp, nor caught its rudiments from the multitude of the servants and subjects of its King? It is a foreign tongue to them, for they are "strangers and foreigners," "alienated from the conversation of Israel." It is unattainable by the alien, as was Scibboleth to the Ephraimite.† Those "words of God," which worldlings steadily refuse to make the rule of their life, nay, of one day of their life, can never be otherwise than a reproof, whensoever the

* Isaias xxix. 10—12.

† Judges xii. 6.

accents fall on their ears. The science of the Saints is a secret hidden from those who desire not to go through the apprenticeship that gains it. Every craft has its terms; and the service of God is a craft to be mastered by no royal road. The earnestness of a hard student is needed here, though every step of the blessed learning is sweetened to be its own reward. It is the medium of affectionate familiar intercourse in a family circle of which our Lord is the head: "and the Mother of Jesus is there: and Jesus also, . . . and His disciples." But these men have no title-deeds to show, by which to claim a seat at that board. Were they to be placed among the guests, without the wedding garment, with no preparation of ear or heart, no acquaintance with the manners of the place, no share in the interests of those who are assembled, would they, could they, find it or make it their home?

2. On the other hand, these words of the text minister a very true and solid consolation to souls that love Him, and are yet afflicted by the fear of not belonging to Him. They are unable to take the comfort He designs for them in reward for their fidelity, and as encouraging them to persevere. Their best efforts fall so far short of the standard His grace has set before their minds; their prayers are so distracted, and seem so lifeless; they realize His presence in so feeble a measure, while the world is vivid and tangible all around; temptations assail them, suddenly or persistently; they are conscious of the force of the buffet, and not secure as to the courage of their resistance. Do they indeed belong

to the flock of the Shepherd of souls? Are they in His grace and favour? Now, to this agonizing doubt our Lord gives an answer of comfort. "My sheep hear My voice." "He that is of God, heareth the words of God." It is as though He repeated and enforced the declaration which He had put into the mouth of His prophet, more than seven centuries before: "Who is there among you that feareth the Lord, *that heareth the voice of His servant*, that hath walked in darkness, and hath no light? Let him hope in the name of the Lord, and lean upon his God."* The most obvious and immediate fulfilment of this blessed encouragement is for those who, in the Sacrament of Penance, have the whole Gospel epitomized for their comfort. They possess His promises, the cheering voice of His fatherly love, concentrated as in a focus upon themselves. They inherit, in its fulness, the declaration: "He that heareth you, heareth Me." Darkness cannot long overcloud their souls, but that they will recognize it as a trial of faith and patience, and no withdrawal of His love.

The Prophet's assurance, here given, affords the same comforting token of the state of earnest souls before God, which the text also announces from Himself. Do they "hear the words" of His servant? Are they interested in His word ministered to them by spiritual books, and by oral instruction? "It is written in the prophets," says our Lord, "And they shall all be taught of God:"† shall all be *teachable* to God, as the Vulgate reads

* Isaias l. 10.

† St. John vi. 45.

it. Our Lord here refers to those comforting words of Isaias, who had announced it as one especial blessing of the Gospel dispensation, that the Divine will should be manifested to men, not obscurely, but with all distinctness ; not with terror and compulsion, as might be said of the revelation from Mount Sinai, but in sweetness and consolation to the redeemed soul. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a moment of indignation have I hid My face a little while from thee ; but with everlasting kindness have I had mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. . . For the mountains shall be moved, and the hills shall tremble : but My mercy shall not depart from thee, and the covenant of My peace shall not be moved, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee. O poor little one, tossed with tempest, without all comfort, behold, I will lay thy stones in order, and will lay thy foundations with sapphires. . . All thy children shall be taught of the Lord : and great shall be the peace of thy children."* Again, as a comfort and encouragement : "Weeping thou shalt not weep, He will surely have pity on thee : at the voice of thy cry, as soon as He shall hear, He will answer thee, thy eyes shall see thy teacher ; and thy ears shall hear the word of one admonishing thee behind thy back : This is the way, walk ye in it : and go not aside, neither to the right hand, nor to the left."† "Thus saith the Lord thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel : I am the Lord thy God,

* Isaias liv. 7—13.

† Isaias xxx. 19—21.

that teach thee profitable things, that govern thee in the way that thou walkest.”*

Let earnest souls, then, “hope in the name of the Lord, and lean upon their God.” Let them expand in the genial atmosphere of His teaching, and hide themselves† “in His tabernacle in the day of evils.” He will protect them in the secret place of His tabernacle, as within a tranquil inner hall of instruction; a quiet Bethany where, with Mary, they shall sit at His gracious feet, and learn His words. They have heard of Him by the hearing of the ear, but then their eyes shall see Him. Their ponderings on His word within their hearts shall kindle in them that ardent flame that consumes the dross, and purifies the whole man, that creates a clean heart and renews a right spirit within him, reforming him in the newness of his mind, conforming him to the image of God’s own Son, transforming him into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord. In their meditation this sacred fire shall flame out: a blessed hunger and thirst for God shall take the place of their languor, mistrust, and discouragement; a hunger ever renewed, the more they feed on His word, and the nearer they approach to Himself: they shall know, and they shall follow on, that they may know the Lord.‡

* *Isaias* xlviii. 17.

† *Psalm* xxvi. 5.

‡ *Job* xlii. 5; *Isaias* i. 25; *Psalm* l. 12; *Rom.* xii. 2, viii. 29; 2 *Cor.* iii. 18; *Psalm* xxxix. 3; *St. Matt.* v. 6; *Psalm* cvi. 9; *Ecclus.* xxiv. 29; *Osee* vi. 3.

Indeed, if we are honestly conscious that we desire to know God's will through His appointed channels, and to know it that we may fulfil it to the utmost, the sacred pages may be said to teem with consolatory assurances. Only let us place in contrast two passages, which address the two several classes of men, the hearers and the despisers of His word. On the one hand : "Hear the word of the Lord, you that tremble at His word : your brethren that hate you, and cast you out for My Name's sake . . shall be confounded."* On the other hand, to those Jews who were in danger of setting at nought the Apostle's preaching : "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish ; for I work a work in your days, a work which you will not believe, if any man shall tell it to you."†

Our Lord has declared that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. And so, out of the interest most prevailing at the heart, the ear listens. "The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made them both." Hence St. Paul speaks so strongly of the sensual man, who perceives not, and in his present state of soul, cannot perceive, the things that are of the Spirit of God.‡ He has no taste for them ; his interests lie the other way. On the other hand, the things of God are "spiritually examined," and examined by those who have a heart for the study. The children of God gladly receive every message from their Father, and their future home. "As new-born infants," exhorts the Apostle, "desire the

* Isaias lxvi. 5.

† Acts xiii. 41.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 14.

rational milk without guile, that thereby you may grow unto salvation: if yet you have tasted that the Lord is sweet."*

This plain difference, let us say it again, marks off two opposing interests, in every department of living. Take the use of time, and the objects on which it is employed. On the one side, what waste and squandering of precious life! What deaf ears to the warnings that tell of its swift passage, and of the account which every hour, as it flies, bears up to the throne! Men are resolved not to hear of a God Who judgeth according to each man's work; and they invent, as it were, a figment of their imagination, and give to it the name of Deity. They imagine one whose mercy shall be a copy and reflection of their own indolent condoning of each other's faults; and whose justice shall be, like theirs, weak of ken, wayward of purpose, swayed by some motive of the hour. They compose for themselves a fifth Gospel, and stamp it with all the authority of their own wishes, that makes it at least inspired for themselves. It tells them they may live to their humours, during their brief span, and then clothe themselves with the wedding garment, at a moment's notice. Fearful delusion, that carries them across the line which separates time from eternity! Then is the wakening. Then every grain in the hour-glass gives in its witness against them. Then the words of God, which they have not heard, because *they* were not of God, stand forth as the unerring balance of the sanctuary, that contains their doom. They

* 1 St. Peter ii. 1, 2.

are "weighed in the balance, and found wanting."* "He that despiseth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him. The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."† How true, how fearful, majestic, and unanswerable, will appear to them every declaration of *His* gracious will, Who had invited, pleaded, all but compelled them to listen and be saved! During life, His word seems to them "as an idle tale," listened to indolently, as the ripple of a brook that murmurs by; falling on the ear, but awakening no attention. Then, alas for them, that word will prove a word of fire: *Ignitum eloquium tuum vehementer*;‡ and burn it must. It has burnt away the dross from the hearts of those who hid it there as their treasure and strength: "Thy words have I hidden in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee."§ It will burn without consuming, and devour without annihilating, the miserable victims of the Divine justice and of their own persistent deafness to its voice: dwelling in their memories as an undying worm of remorse; kindling, with all the force of His eternal decree, the very flames of their hopeless torment: "the breath of the Lord, as a torrent of brimstone, kindling it."||

And now what, on the contrary, is the temper of those who are of God, and hear the words of God? We can hardly open that Psalter, which is the very store-house of the sighs and aspirations of the Church's children, but in the first words we

* Dan. v. 27.

† St. John xii. 48.

‡ Psalm cxviii. 140.

§ Psalm v. 11.

|| Isaias xxx. 33.

find the expression of an ardent welcome to His voice. Every communication He deigns to make to His own is received into a willing heart. It is a message waited for: it meets a need, and answers a yearning. "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready."* They only desire to know more, and to see deeper into it. "Open Thou my eyes, and I will consider the wondrous things of Thy law."† And this they desire, not as a speculation, but to reduce their knowledge to practice. "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths." "Make me to understand the way of Thy justifications: and I shall be exercised in Thy wondrous works."‡ Even when the ascetical practice to which their acquired knowledge may urge them, assumes a shape which seems hard to flesh and blood: "For the sake of the words of Thy lips, I have kept hard ways. Perfect Thou my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps be not moved."§

This is the interpretation of that fidelity of the saints, which appears so wonderful to our weak and wayward souls. This is why they walked through life, absorbed, as it were, in God; "walking with God," as Enoch and Noe; walking before the Almighty God, and being perfect, as Abraham;|| walking, in Gospel times, by the increased light, and growing to perfection after the more perfect model, "in the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure

* Psalm lvi. 8. † Psalm cxviii. 18.

‡ Psalm cxviii. 105, 27.

§ Psalm xvi. 4, 5. || Gen. v. 22-24; vi. 9; xvii. 1.

of the age of the fulness of Christ.”* The reason has been simply this: they have heard—as was foretold, in words that cannot be too often quoted—heard a voice behind them, saying: “This is the way, walk ye in it.” They have heard their Divine Master calling them: “Follow Me:” and they have left all that had to be left, and have followed Him. What St. Paul says of the eye of faith, is true also of the ear of faith. Faith is “the conviction of things that appear not”† to the bodily sight. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ;”‡ reporting things unseen and eternal, through the outward ear. In either case, it is a message of the invisible, accepted by the heart that is prepared to receive it. Now, “My just one,” says Almighty God, “liveth by faith;”§ and by faith he sees Him, and walks with Him.

The saints, then, “through faith wrought justice, obtained promises.” Their lives were hidden with Christ in God. With Christ they were nailed to the Cross: and they lived, no longer themselves, but Christ lived in them: and the lives they lived in the flesh, they lived in the faith of the Son of God, Who loved them, and delivered Himself for them.|| Their especial paths, as also their personal characteristics, differed greatly. How unlike, in many ways, were St. Benedict and St. Francis of Sales, St. Ignatius and St. Philip, or St. Dominic and the Seraph of Assisi! Some saints have been noted for austerities, at which the flesh might creep; or for a

* Ephes. iv. 13.

† Heb. xi. 1.

‡ Rom. x. 17.

§ Heb. x. 38.

|| Coloss. iii. 3; Gal. ii. 19, 20.

silence and an absorption all but unbroken. Others have been remarkable rather for attractive sweetness, or even playfulness, of manner. Some have had frequent ecstasies and visions; while, of others, few such special gifts are recorded. Some have remained upon their earthly thrones; others have abdicated them, exchanging a crown for a cloister. Some have cultivated every field of human learning; others have known no science but that of prayer and suffering. But in one thing they were alike, as the primary condition of their being saints at all. They habitually listened to the voice of God, the voice of their Beloved. This was the sweet and powerful appeal that overmastered all other sounds: this was constantly in their ears, whatever else were passing at their side. To this they returned, after every interruption, as to their connatural element; as the flying-fish to the sea, as the eagle to the air: they breathed more freely, and expanded with gladness, as knowing "it was good for them to be" with their transfigured Lord.

But eminent above all other pure creatures, however saintly and faithful, who ever heard the word of God, and kept it, one among the daughters of Eve has "surpassed them all."* One heart and will has approached, immeasurably nearer than others, to His, for whom the word of prophecy said: "The Lord God hath opened my ear."† One existence on earth has ever been devoted, from the moment of its first being, to the undivided, unfaltering love of the "Father of Spirits," and an absorbed

* Prov. xxxi. 29.

† Isaías i. 5.

attention to every whisper of His grace. Others may have had periods when their fidelity in some measure relaxed; or they have listened mainly to God, and partially to other voices beside. They may have had interests secondary, blameless, and not antagonistic, yet co-existing in their hearts with the single apprehension and pursuit of their Creator's word. Here, on the contrary, in this one signal and perfect creation of His Omnipotence, growing up, even among His saints, "as the lily among thorns," you have their queen, their model, the ideal of a "participation in the Divine nature."* An Immaculate Conception was her first step on a faultless path, that "as a shining light, goeth forward and increaseth even to perfect day."† The Divine productive charity, brooding with complacency over that masterpiece of His creation, not only pronounced it "very good," but raised it higher in the scale of goodness than all the magnificent intelligences, whether they be thrones, dominations, principalities, or powers, in the splendour and purity of their nine circling ranks; higher than the height of those especial seven who are nighest to His throne. The worth of Mary, solitary and singular, outweighs that of the aggregate of pure creatures, whom He ever has gifted with being, or, in this scheme of Providence, ever will.

Yet for our great encouragement, in the moment when the glories of her divine maternity were signally proclaimed, our Lord points to that characteristic of His Blessed Mother in which, at our far distance, we

* 2 St. Peter i. 4.

† Prov. iv. 18.

are to imitate her example. A woman lifts up her voice in the crowd that surrounds Him. Struck with the graciousness of His words, the majestic sweetness and condescension of His presence, the new life that awakes at His teaching, her thoughts naturally go forth to the Blessed Mother that bore Him. Every daughter of Israel, one excepted, had yearned to be the mother of the Messias. This long lingering hope, through centuries of time, had made celibacy a thing to be bewailed,* and barrenness seem a curse and a misfortune.† What wonder, then, that this simple-hearted woman, mother, perhaps, of sons who had disappointed and wounded her maternal love, should be penetrated by the thought of *her* blessedness who had borne this great Teacher and Holy One? "Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that Thou hast sucked." And His answer is, "Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it."‡ He accepts for His Mother the attribution of the one blessedness, while He points to the other. But what must be the height of that blessedness of Mary as His disciple, if it can range for a moment with that of Mary as His Mother? What is the greatness of the grace, growing with her spiritual growth, internal, and rendering her soul acceptable to Him, which won for her in the divine counsels the office and mission of being the tabernacle of His Incarnation? With what degree of blessedness did she conceive that Eternal Word within her heart, before it was made known to her that she was to minister

* Judges xi. 37—40.

† 1 Kings i. 6, 10, 11.

‡ St. Luke xi. 27, 28.

the substance of her virginal flesh and blood to that same Word as the Child of her womb? Mary, immaculate in her first thought of the first moment of being; Mary, loving the Eternal Wisdom Who then taught her Himself; Mary, the infant Queen of all Saints, hearing His word and keeping it, before she had left her mother's arms; both hearing and keeping it with a completeness and a perfection surpassing that of all His other servants and handmaidens; growing, as her Divine Son afterwards, in wisdom and age, and in grace with God and men, but growing according to a measure and a spiritual stature all her own, unapproachable, ineffable; "growing into a holy temple in the Lord, . . . built into a habitation of God in the Spirit :"* this is the Mary of whom Jesus here speaks. She hears the word of God, and keeps it, as the type of all who shall recognize, to the end of time, that to live with that aim is the one only thing deserving of a thought. She knows it the "one thing necessary," and "has chosen the best part." All else is to her as if it was not. There is no correspondence in her soul to the appeal of any interest beside. The future Mother of God, as a dedicated child in the Temple, is already so much more than young Samuel as the queen is above the servant; the language of the Immaculate Heart is this, without ceasing: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

Not on one special occasion only, as with the child-prophet, who "did not yet know the Lord, neither had the word of the Lord been revealed to him,"† "before the lamp of God went out, in the

* Ephes. ii. 21, 22. † 1 Kings iii. 7.

temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was ;" when the Lord called him by name, and he mistook the voice—not thus was the soul of Mary ever drinking in the Divine communications. With her, "day to day uttereth speech, and night to night showeth knowledge."* "My Beloved to me, and I to Him Who feedeth among the lilies." "I sleep, but my heart watcheth, the voice of my Beloved knocking." "He wakeneth in the morning, in the morning He wakeneth my ear, that I may hear Him as a master."†

Is she not hearing God's word and keeping it, when at her midnight prayer she ponders, that young maiden of fifteen, the voices of the ancient covenant that foretell the coming of the new ; and "all things written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and, in the Psalms, concerning Him" ? Is she not keeping His word when, conscious that He had accepted and smiled upon her vow of self-dedication, she pauses at the Archangel's announcement, and consents to be the Mother of God, then only, when she learns that she shall still remain His consecrated handmaid ? Is it not ever the same disciple of the Word, who now, a maiden mother, with the matured wisdom of the Queen of Prophets, sits in spirit at the feet of Him Who is her boy of twelve years old, and "keeps" all His words in her heart ?‡ Thus, our Blessed Lady is the second Eve, not only in her relation to the Son of Man, Who came to repair the ruins of our first parents' fall, but as compensating, by her faithful attention to the voice of the Eternal, for the fatal ambition and self-will of her who listened to the

* Psalm xviii. 3. † Cant. ii. 16, v. 2 ; Isaias l. 4. ‡ St. Luke ii. 51.

whisper of His great enemy. "You shall be as gods, knowing good and evil," was the seduction that brought in sin, and death, and perdition. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word," was the assent that brought down life, grace, redemption to men.

3. This warning of our Divine Master, opens out a wide and fruitful field for criticism of ourselves. The point it suggests may profitably form a point for our particular examen of conscience. Its importance to us, its necessity even, can hardly be over-stated. If a readiness to hear God's word, and to hear it with an earnest and practical desire to do what we hear, be a test and watchword whereby His own are distinguished from others, then let us look into our own hearts. It is no difficult or elaborate proof that we are seeking. Every one knows what is his own dominant interest; what is the subject that most readily stirs and moves him. This is what our Lord speaks of as the heart's "abundance." Other things occupy the heart in some degree, but this engrosses and absorbs it. Other things arouse it tardily; this, on the instant. The master-passion is like the strong man armed, keeping his court: other aims, views, interests, may come and go amid the outworks, but this has the very keys of the fortress, and garrisons the citadel. The ambitious man may be also a man of literature: he is the first essentially, the latter by a kind of accident, of more or less prominence. We have heard of statesmen amusing their leisure hours with letters, as though they were formed to be elegant triflers in a library. But let anything touch their

ambitious views ; an occasion of advancing them, a danger of missing their aim ; the books are thrown aside, like the distaff from the hero of ancient fable, when in his frivolous disguise he lit on the helmet and the sword. Again, the man devoted to study may know some stirrings of ambition ; but they come to him at intervals, rather as a reverie than an earnest claim on his attention, and readily yield before the imperious command of the master-interest. Does not history give us more than one striking portrait of the man of pleasure who was also a man of public life ? And the record of God's great Book at the last, far more intimately than any human chronicle, however minute, will show the struggle in which that soul was rent and devoured by the contending vipers of sensuality and ambition it had nourished within ; perhaps the life-long, interminable combat, perhaps the final triumph of one evil motive slaying its antagonist. Or, more awful conflict still, the struggle mentioned by St. Paul, and which some expositors refer to that of a weak Christian, wavering between the opposing claims of good and evil. " That which I work, I understand not. For I do not that good which I will ; but the evil which I hate, that I do. If, then, I do that which I will not, I consent to the law, that it is good. . . For to will good is present with me, but to accomplish that which is good, I find not. For the good which I will, I do not ; but the evil which I will not, that I do. . . I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me."*

* Rom. vii. 15, 21.

There is no one heart absolutely void ; none that is not possessed by an interest of one kind or other. It may be an object of pursuit so empty, so trifling, so unworthy, so sure to disappoint, that the wonder strikes us how any one gifted with reason should move a step, or raise a finger, to attain it. Still, the interest is there ; and it not only occupies, but denotes, its entertainer. So in the balance of eternal things as against the things of time. The all-important question is : Which of the two really occupies our heart ? St. Paul speaks for those on whose souls the grace of God is shining, and who are attending to the voice of His call. "We look," he says, "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen, are temporal ; but the things which are not seen, are eternal."*

Let us take one prominent example. What, then, was the interest of the prophet Daniel in Babylon ? What occupied his heart ? Here we have a rising man at court, honoured by four successive kings, occupying, whatsoever captivities or changes passed around him, a position eminent and assured : "governor over all the provinces of Babylon, chief of the magistrates over all the wise men of Babylon," having his home in the palace, able to promote his friends also to high place ;† afterwards, by the last of a falling dynasty, even while he denounced the impending doom, honoured with royal apparel, and power as the third man in the kingdom ; promoted still, by the conqueror, to be one of the supreme

* 2 Cor. iv. 18.

† Daniel ii. 48, 49.

princes in the new kingdom, and destined for the viceregal throne.* More than all this, he is so great in the spiritual world, by reason of "the spirit of the holy gods," and "the excellent knowledge, and understanding, and wisdom" found in him;† so clear a discerner of the invisible, reading the counsels decreed on high; gazing into the Apocalypse of the Old Testament, and so miraculously "interpreting obscure things and resolving difficult things," that "King Nabuchodonosor fell on his face and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer in sacrifice to him victims and incense."‡

Look closer into this eminent life. You have a man great as was Joseph in Egypt, and swaying a far wider empire; uniting in himself the functions of prophet and almost king. What a place would he occupy in the annals of Babylon the Great! What explorer of ancient ruins would now be surprised to find him enthroned amid his vassals, in her historic bas-reliefs and paintings? to learn from inscriptions that his name lived for generations in the songs of a grateful people, gladdened by his mild, beneficent rule? Yet this Daniel, the great, as all in Babylon proclaimed him, was not found seated at Baltassar's royal board. He was not at the side of Nabuchodonosor as he walked in that palace of Babylon,§ when the king's heart was lifted up at beholding the magnificent creation of his own hands. No; Daniel was statesman and chief ruler, accidentally; he was prophet, by a favour not connected, of necessity, with

* Daniel vi. 2—4.

† Daniel v. 14.

‡ Daniel ii. 46.

§ Daniel iv. 27.

sanctification ; but he was, by the very essence of his character, a hearer of the words of God to his own heart, and a man of prayer. What was his long life in that proud city—his life of a hundred years ? Since the day when, by his youthful wisdom, he defended an accused and innocent person against her enemies, we hardly read of any voluntary act of his, but that, in the face of an impious royal decree, “he went into his house, and opening the windows in his upper chamber towards Jerusalem, he knelt down three times a day, and adored, and gave thanks before his God, as he had been accustomed to do before.” His enemies, “carefully watching him, found Daniel praying and making supplication to his God.”*

Before this, he had recorded of himself : “I set my face to the Lord my God, to pray and make supplication with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes.” And again, “in the third year of Cyrus, King of the Persians,” and therefore quite in the prophet’s last days, in his extreme old age, he did not spare himself ; his life was not a well-earned repose in silken ease. Prayer, mortification, heavenly love—in a word, attention to hear God’s words, formed the persevering employment of that signal life, even to the end. As we contemplate him, we are carried in thought to the exile of St. John in Patmos ; so solitary, so detached, so unearthly, so tender, is the form of this “man of desires,” the prototype of the beloved disciple. “In those days, I Daniel mourned the days of three weeks. I ate no desirable bread, and neither flesh nor wine entered into my mouth, neither was I anointed with

* Daniel vi. 10, 11.

ointment, till the days of three weeks were accomplished."* "Thou man of desires!"† how glorious, how blessed a title to receive from the great Archangel! "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice." "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it." "Blessed are the undefiled in the way. Blessed are they that search His testimonies, that seek Him with their whole heart." "Blessed is the man whose will is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he shall meditate day and night." "Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee; in his heart he hath disposed to ascend by steps, in the vale of tears. . . They shall go from virtue to virtue."‡ Such benedictions as these attach to every soul who can be called, like Daniel, "a man of desires:" yearning for a greater knowledge of God's will; earnest in inquiry, diligent in preparation of heart, courageous in setting aside whatever would hinder the gain of this "one thing needful." "This is the generation of them that seek Him, of them that seek the face of the God of Jacob."§

"Take heed, therefore, how ye hear," is the strenuous lesson impressed on us, by the attentive and loving obedience of God's children on one hand, by the careless, reprobate contempt of His voice, which is daily manifested on the other. To hear, is to incur a distinct responsibility: one, indeed, from which no man can escape, though he be "like the

* Daniel x. 2, 3.

† Daniel ix. 23; x. 11, 19.

‡ St. Luke xi. 28; St. Matt. v. 6; Psalm cxviii. 1, 2, i. 2, lxxxiii. 6—8.

§ Psalm xxiii. 6.

deaf asp that stoppeth her ears : which will not hear the voice of the charmers, nor of the wizard that charmeth wisely."* To hear, or to be capable of hearing, to live within sound of God's voice, means that an immortal responsible soul is addressed by Him, no one of whose words can fall to the ground. It is to have communicated to him a clearer light, and an increased knowledge of the Supreme and absolute will. This is a talent to trade with : it is a talent to account for. The loan is entered in God's book, and will appear when "the books are opened, and the dead shall be judged out of those things that are written in the books."† "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required : and to whom they have committed much, of him they will demand the more."‡ "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."§ "Take heed, therefore, how ye hear. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given ; and whosoever hath not, that also which he thinketh he hath, shall be taken away from him."|| Faithfulness to light increases it, by drawing down into the soul a larger infusion of grace. Faithlessness to light and to grace received, is the first step on the downward plane that leads to an insensible and hardened soul. It may end in that reprobation of which we are warned by the evangelist, quoting the prophet : "Whereas He had done so many miracles before them, they believed not in Him : that the saying of Isaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he said : Lord, who hath believed our hearing ? and to whom

* Psalm lvii. 5, 6. † Apoc. xx. 12. ‡ St. Luke xii. 48.

§ St. Mark iv. 23.

|| St. Luke viii. 18.

hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, for Isaias said again: He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart: that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.”*

May such truths awaken us to a perception of the great graces we have received, the blessedness of increasing them by use, and the imminent danger that hangs over us, of losing them to our eternal loss. As rational beings, we hear the first accents of our Creator inviting us onward to a clearer announcement of His will, and of Himself. Born into the knowledge of Christianity as a fact, and the text of the Gospels, that voice is intensified to us, and made more articulate. But as children of the Catholic faith, we possess the full unclouded revelation, the distinct invitation and command; “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ.”† “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His beloved Son.”‡ We hear, by an infallible teaching, and by the gift of faith we recognize and accept, His every syllable. “See that you refuse not Him who speaketh. For if they escaped not, who refused him that spoke upon earth, much more shall not we, who turn away from Him that speaketh to us from heaven. Whose voice then moved the earth: but now He promiseth, saying: Yet once more, and I will move not only the earth, but heaven also.”§

* St. John xii. 37-40.

† 2 Cor. iv. 6. ‡ Col. i. 13. § Heb. xii. 25, 26.

Unendurable, final word, to souls in whom the gift of faith has lain as a barren thing, a talent wrapped in a napkin, never utilised in their practice! How vain a plea will it then be shown, how hollow a mockery, that they have known, believed, and even spoken to others, if themselves have not heeded and obeyed! "Not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of My Father, who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Many will say to Me in that day: Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name, and in Thy Name cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in Thy Name? And then will I profess unto them: I never knew you: depart from Me, you that work iniquity. . . Every one that heareth these My words, and doth them not, shall be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof,"*

But rather, let that perfect love which casteth out fear, move us to listen to each hourly indication of His will, on whom we are striving to fix these wayward hearts of ours. He says to us: "If you continue in My word, you shall be My disciples indeed: and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."† Continuing in His word, neglecting no precept, no rule, consciously missing no round on the ladder of perfection, adopting with earnestness each practice that may bring us nearer to Himself, and

* St. Matt. vi. 21-27.

† St. John viii. 31, 32.

make our lives more Christ-like; we shall by no means lose our reward. What does the Apostle promise us on this head? "He that hath looked into the perfect law of liberty, and hath continued in it, not becoming a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work; this man shall be blessed in his deed."*

Far more: what is the promise of the Lord and Teacher of the Apostles? How does He encourage and invite each one, however poor in all things else, however unskilled in other knowledge, if only he be this earnest, faithful, loving, and persevering disciple? "Thus saith the High and the Eminent that inhabiteth eternity: and His Name is Holy; who dwelleth in the high and holy place, and with a contrite and humble spirit: to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."* And what is His promise? What saith He to the humble listener, to the faithful doer, of His word? He invites him to an acceptance so thorough, a communing so intimate, and friendship so unspeakably condescending, so blessed, nay, overwhelming, that human utterance would never dare so bold a flight. It remained for Himself to clothe it in words, uttered from His throne of glory. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man shall *hear My voice*, and open to Me the gate, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."*

* St. James i. 25.

† Isaias lvii. 15.

‡ Apoc. iii. 20.; compare i. 13—18.

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